

# Illustrating the City

*Identity and Urban Experience in Indian Picturebooks*

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*A city is more than a place in space,  
it is a drama in time*

— Patrick Geddes

# **Abstract**

Space is not neutral. Social relations influence, and play out in, space. Literature too, reflects social space and simultaneously is influenced by the urban. As a mode of communication, picturebooks have immense potential in archiving and mirroring the social dynamics that imbue space with meaning. The urban has transformative potential; and gender has a bearing on one's understanding and experience of the urban. When there is unequal development, infrastructure further disenfranchises the marginalised. Through a critical analysis of contemporary Indian picturebooks, I argue that for a true exploration of identity and the urban experience, we must understand cities and picturebooks in their cultural and material setting.

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*A Walk with Thambi* by Lavanya Karthik, illustrated by Proiti Roy

*Mukand and Riaz* by Nina Sabnani

*Where's that Cat?* by Manjula Padmanabhan

*Neelu's Big Box* by Nandini Nayar, illustrated by Shreya Sen

*Red* by Sagar Kolwankar

*I Will Save My Land* by Rinchin, illustrated by Sagar Kolwankar

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## **Declaration**

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged in the Bibliography.

# Introduction

Close to a hundred years ago, the sociologist Louis Wirth (1938, p. 9) defined cities as “relatively large, dense, and permanent settlements of socially heterogeneous individuals.” What makes them unique is that nowhere else has humankind been as far removed from nature as it has in the way life is lived in cities. Cities typically have high densities and large concentrations of people in a specified area, around which smaller clusters exist, and together they give rise to a way of living that we call urbanism. Cities exert great influence on people’s social lives, because not only are they the place where people live and work, they are also the concentration and controlling centre of large amounts of resources — social, economic, and cultural. The city continues to dominate surrounding hinterland because urban life creates, allows and promotes a certain division of labour and specialised occupations. At the same time, it is also true, as Lefebvre (1996) notes, that the need to centralise goods and services from rural activity, is what births and sustains cities (Misoczky & de Oliveira, 2018).

Cities around the world have changed radically in the last two centuries, and this is mirrored by changes in nearly all aspects of social life not just in cities but also in rural areas surrounding cities, owing to the increased efficiency of means of travel and communication between the urban and the rural. Consequently, rural areas and rural life will mirror or complement urban life. The converse too is just as true — urban lives continue to bear the imprint of an earlier folk society, as Louis Wirth (1938) argues.

To really understand how urbanism is a distinct mode of living, we need to go beyond seeing cities as mere static, geographic entities. As spaces where socially heterogeneous individuals congregate in large numbers, cities allow for the breaking down (or redefinition) of caste and class structures, creating new systems of hierarchy and stratification that are based on relationships of utility between individuals — each of our acquaintances exists in order to be of utility to us, as a means of achieving our own ends. And one could argue that it is precisely this characteristic of the urban that allows people to leave behind orthodox or regressive practices that defined their rural life, creating for themselves (and others) a life that is more progressive and freeing. However, what the community does not provide, the individual must buy, and, slowly, resources that were earlier

freely available become accessible only upon payment, and with varying degrees of ease, fairness, and negotiation, as a function of the individual's place in the city's social stratification.

Much can be gathered about a society from its literature and from the youngest members. Unfortunately though, children's spaces and their concerns are deemed not permanent and in a phase of transition that they will eventually outgrow. Therefore, their social-spatial concerns are not given the same primacy as adults, unless it is in the field of competitive education which is also only as proto infrastructure that can breed a better class of adults, but not 'for children/for childhood's sake'. Similarly, a lot can be gathered about a country's social condition from contestations over its space, and vice versa. I am interested in investigating contemporary India's understanding of, and relationship with, space. I also wish to look at how social identity and the politics of gender and class influence a child's negotiation of space. Since an individual's relationship with space is shaped through childhood and undergoes transformations throughout adolescence, my aim is to study the representations of space and place in contemporary children's and young adults' literature in India, and understand how changing spatial dynamics reflect changing social dynamics.

## Research Questions

- In writings about urban life, children's literature is focused on the child in relation to the urban social space. How is the urban experience represented in children's literature?
- How do children's picture books contribute to place-making in relation to the politics of gender and social identity?
- How do children's picture books articulate the dialectical relation between social and spatial relations?

Books and literature serve as a way of archiving and creatively rendering a space's many incarnations — as private or public, gendered, liberal, elite, etc. Contemporary Indian literature serves as an alternative form of historical record and as an archive of the way in which battles over urban space are deeply linked to questions of modernity, gender, access to education, etc.

I extend de Certeau's argument (2011) that every story is a spatial practice — every story traverses and organises places. Stories constantly transform spaces into places. When one writes about Indian cities post liberalisation, the official façade of the city is stripped away exposing new layers of urban space and, therefore, meaning. Over the last two and a half decades, as new experiences bring 'modernity', 'western culture', consumerism and increased privatisation of space, is there a change in the ontology of the city? "Adult" spaces are fought for, considering that adults have more agency and voice than children, but children's spaces are silently getting privatised and disappearing. What is the response of the child to these new spaces and new kinds of social relationships? How is place making influenced by different experiences of gender and class?

Children's literature is an area of critical inquiry that continues to play a central role in shaping perceptions of the city, of lifestyles, and of the people who traverse the urban landscape. Social scientists have been preoccupied with the role that the urban environment has in shaping human relations, and vice versa, since the time of the Industrial Revolution in Europe. Space is a challenging concept to grasp, full of abstractions and is increasingly understood in conjunction with power and knowledge. What, then, is children's engagement with urban spaces? As individuals with 'little' agency, how do they negotiate spaces? Places do not hold and reflect the same values for all those who invest meaning in them — depending on caste, social class, gender, access, individual aspirations, etc. the values attached to a space vary greatly. For example, how is a migrant/street child's perception of home different from that of an upper-class child? Do young boys and girls experience the city in the same way — without differences in access or surveillance?

## Methods

To answer these questions, I have studied the representation of social space in some recent English-language picturebooks published in India over the last two decades. Having worked as an editor at an independent children's publishing house in Chennai, India, for five years, I am familiar with the picturebook industry. With this knowledge, I had a longlist of fifteen books dealing with various themes, for varying age groups, and representing multiple childhoods and experiences. With Jennifer Robinson's *Ordinary Cities* (Robinson, 2006) as a guide, I narrowed this list down to include only those books that spoke about space and social life rooted in India's postcolonial socio-cultural context, in order to explore the Indian urban experience. Of these ten books, I chose

eight, dividing them according to two main criteria. The first five books (*Mukand and Riaz*, *A Walk With Thambi*, *Neelu's Big Box*, *Where's That Cat?*, *Red*) served as very good examples to illustrate the various kinds of picturebooks, with special attention to the picture—text dynamic, based on the typologies proposed by children's literature scholars like Maria Nikolajeva, Carole Scott, Perry Nodelman, Lawrence Sipe and Christophe Meunier. The other three (*Drawing from the City*, *Water*, *I Will Save My Land*) spoke of unique experiences of urban India. Further, these three books traverse the rural and the urban in their setting, making them excellent source material for the questions I set out to answer. This apart, these three books, which form the crux of my analysis, have been created by tribal artists and activists working with tribal people's movements — voices that are a rarity in mainstream publishing. Having shortlisted these books, I began to identify broad themes that emerged common to all books, after which I weighed them against the theories and perspectives offered by spatial theorists, sociologists and geographers including Doreen Massey, Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, Georg Simmel, Mark Purcell, Samuel Stroope, and Louis Wirth.

Sociology has paid scant attention to literature and art, prioritising the instrumental aspects of social life, and efforts have been made only in recent decades to fix this gap (Albrecht, 1954). As Gillian Rose (2007) suggests, we need to read pictures and text in their material setting to understand how they come together and create meaning. Naturally then, picturebooks become potent source material for socio-spatial analysis. Modern picturebooks present the reader with contemplative questions (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006). I go beyond just studying the textual and the visual mediums in picturebooks, and try to understand the deeper layers of meaning embedded in these representations — what are the relationships between the actors staking their claim to a space; what are the hierarchies that are inherent in different kinds of spaces; does the urban allow the specific experiences and ways of living of certain groups of people?

I have focused on three books which, in a recent phenomenon, describe the urban experience from different perspectives: *Drawing from the City* (2012) by Tejubehan Jogi, *Water* (2017) by Subhash Vyam and *I Will Save My Land* (2017) by Rinchin, in order to study the various ways in which the urban is written about in contemporary picturebooks — what specific kinds of behaviour does the urban allow, what does this say about the aspirations of the people inhabiting these spaces, and how do certain goods and services like infrastructure networks create unequal spaces and unequal lives. All policies have spatial consequences. Specifically, how does infrastructure function as a

site of the production of the everyday in cities. In trying to answer these questions, I hope to offer a culturally rooted perspective of development, complementing and offsetting western academic approaches with the help of the experiences of contemporary tribal artists, illustrators and social activists as told in these books. As Jennifer Robinson (2006) contends, in prioritising western urban studies such that any city or theory that deviates from it is labelled inferior or an anomaly, the selective memory of the urban canon has forgotten some culturally specific debates about the nature of urbanism, from different parts of the world.

## Space and Narrative

Space is central to social agenda (Silvey, 2006). The social agendas of planners and policymakers are not neutral — they derive from (and carry forward) the dreams, aspirations, biases, and prejudices of the people creating them, and controlling their dissemination to citizens (and arguably non-citizens too). How one understands space is closely connected with age and life experience, because the way — the value system — that space is experienced through, is affected by individual interests and one's own personal experiences (Niskac, et al., 2010). Therefore, space is not neutral, it is not passive. Problems of space are, by extension, problems of the actions of social subjects. Space is the medium by which we navigate quotidian actions (Hess-Lüttich, 2012). And by being lived in and worked upon by people, spaces become 'social spaces' (Lefebvre, 1991), holding together layers of history and meaning.

As Christophe Meunier (2013) suggests, the picturebook is seen as a space of communication — imbued with characteristics of the time and space in which it is created. It conveys representations of the world which surrounds it. Picturebooks, like other children's literature, are one of the most potent manifestations of how the world is interpreted by, and explained to, children (Bavidge, 2006). Consequently, picturebooks play a significant role in the construction of spatial capital. They are performative in that they help establish a dialogue, a conversation between the writer, illustrator and the reader. Picturebooks generate space (Meunier, 2013) as a result of their form and the interdependence between text and illustration. By trying to read space in picturebooks, then, I explore how the idea that space is not neutral intersects with narrative (Bieger & Maruo-Schroeder, 2016). In impacting upon the plots and patterns by which we live, narrative is essential to the creation of the spaces we dwell in, and the places we make. Narrative acts as a constant, as

a sort of stable background, against which the messiness of everyday life plays out in literature. Thus, it becomes a culture-specific code for space (Hess-Lüttich, 2012), embodying the worldview of a specific culture. Similarly, illustrations, as visual text, too carry meaning. Images are crucial not just because they are pervasive, but also because they impact the construction of social differentiation (Rose, 2007). Sarah Pink (2006) warns of the dangers of using images (or illustrations) as an objective, neutral means of documenting social life. This is in line with established arguments in visual anthropology that suggest that images should be seen as constructed narratives. Reading an image is, therefore, an enquiry into how it came to be, and what it intends to do (Rose, 2007).

## Chapter Outline

In the following chapter, I present literature outlining spatial theory, literary representations of the city, postcolonial spatial politics, with a focus on how literature has contributed to the urban experience, and how cities have contributed to literature. Then I move on to the specific case of picturebooks, detailing the multiple definitions of picturebooks and how they create meaning when text and picture ‘collide’. I present a brief evolution of children’s literature in India, with some examples from recent picturebooks that highlight the many kinds of dynamics that come into play when text and picture interact. This is followed by a discussion on the uniqueness of postmodern picturebooks, and the potential they carry to make sense of our socio-spatial concerns. In the next two chapters, I go into a detailed analysis of three picturebooks. I argue, based on my reading of *Drawing from the City*, that the urban has transformative potential; that gender has spatial implications, and that with spatial mobility comes social mobility. Using *Water* and *I Will Save My Land* as examples, I present the traditional view of the rural—urban dichotomy, followed by a more nuanced reading of the relationship between these two geographical spaces, against the backdrop of infrastructure as it is lived and experienced. I conclude reiterating the merits of exploring and studying cities in their specific socio-cultural context, and not as ‘the other’ to conventional western academic perspectives.

# Urban Space and Literature

In this chapter, I review literature around the city as social space — social politics play out in space, politicising the space itself. I then go on to spatial theory, outlining the importance of the spatial turn in literature and sociology. While the city has long featured in literature, especially in the genre of fiction, as the setting, it began to be taken seriously as an active stakeholder in plot development only through the work of early western sociologists. After illustrating how literary representations of space have contributed to the social fabric of cities, I discuss how the converse is also true, albeit as a more recent phenomenon. I conclude the chapter by touching upon the importance of the visual in the construction of social life, setting the stage for a discussion on children's picturebooks in the next chapter.

Why are cities deemed so important in the study of space and spatiality? Cities and urban areas are crucial spatial constructs — they condense and reaffirm the contestation of power relations of a society, because within themselves, in the same geographical boundaries, they hold the processes of both the production and the appropriation of space. While there have been numerous earlier works that are set in or touch upon the idea of the city, it was only in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, through the work of early sociologists like Max Weber, Emile Durkheim and Georg Simmel, that the city began to be taken seriously as the subject, and not just the setting (Lehan, 1994). Following the industrial revolution in Europe, there was large scale migration to cities, and since then the study of cities — urban studies — has become an important field of research, undergoing significant change over the decades.

## Space, Society and Culture

Social scientists have been preoccupied with the role that the urban environment has in shaping human relations since the industrial revolution. Early work in this field maintained that urban life largely reduces and erodes community interaction (Wirth, 1938). However, more recent scholars have proposed that community interaction is a mode of interaction that can exist in various settings, both rural and urban. Fischer (1995) too argues that urbanism, owing to large populations, creates group boundaries that may help foster sub cultural communities, greater community interaction, and reorienting lifestyles to accommodate traditional cultural practices (Stroope, 2012).



The Chicago School of Urbanism was the first to explore the idea of culture as shaping urbanism. Since the 1970s, the social sciences have experienced an important change in their understanding of social life — culture became a crucial means to understanding social processes, identities, change and conflict, not least in urban settings (Millington, 2015). This was known as the cultural turn — social scientists became interested in the ways in which social life is constructed through the ideas that people have about it, and the practices that follow from them. Different groups of societies make sense of the world and respond to it in different ways.

Social life in cities is patterned, and cities are socially organised in a particular way, giving them character, which enables us to talk of them as ‘urban systems’. Cities are part of the ‘created environment’ (Giddens, 2008), in that they are products of human intervention in the material world, and this human intervention is not an overnight phenomenon — it happens over very long, extended periods of times, and the actions at any one time will depend on the legacy of the previous generations. Scholars of the Chicago school argued that at any given point in time, there are millions of people and factors that are shaping the social structure of a city, both consciously and unconsciously. One of the ways that a society negotiates with largescale changes such as urbanisation is through different social groups with hegemonic ambitions trying to reshape and appropriate spaces. This is done by means of a spatial strategy, i.e., strategies that are among those ‘designed to support and maintain’ relations of power or resistance (Deshpande, 1998).

## Spatial Politics

Postcolonial societies have long thrown up questions of space, place and territory, but have been slow to recognise the centrality of urban space to configurations of colonial power in literary studies (Herbert, 2014). The city’s significance emerges from its importance to the colonial project itself — it was a central site for policing the relations between the coloniser and the colonised. Cities were key locations for the administration of empire. And for the production, import and export of goods. They were also important sites in the execution of technologies of power that categorised and controlled the colonised people — town planning was an important tool through which colonial ideas of cleanliness, modesty, civility, and modernity were categorised. While the postcolonial city is haunted by the spatial violence and injustice of years gone by, it is also marked by similar and newer exclusions and exploitations of the present. The spatial order from history

re-emerges through tensions and dynamics between communities with respect to the occupation and control of space in the city in the present. An important concern of postcolonial societies in their literature is the precarious lives of the urban poor who inhabit slums, ghettos and the pavements as homeless people. And as Mike Davis writes in *The Planet of the Slums* (2006), a key character of the megacity, which establishes the pattern of the urban future, is the slum.

Literature from former colonies often explores the idea of ‘lacking a place’ in the contemporary city by situating the experience of walking in relation to questions of citizenship, homelessness and belonging. Michel de Certeau, in one of urban studies’ most seminal works, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (de Certeau, 2011), suggests that to walk is to not have a place and that walkers in cities therefore unsettle pre-existing ideas of dwelling and being at home. As an example, the apparent ease with which figures journey through the city in de Certeau’s work is not a given for the colonised subjects in Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963) (Lehan, 1994). It would therefore be interesting to see how literature set in the colony is different from literature set in the land of the coloniser, especially concerning ideas like modernity and flanerier that the coloniser ‘introduced’ to the colony.

## The Spatial Turn

Literature has by and large focused on the temporal due to a history-centric bias in narration, with historicity and temporality becoming the dominant modes (Shi & Zhu, 2018). This changed with the spatial turn. Michel Foucault prophesied over three decades ago that while till then things were understood in temporal terms, ‘the present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space’ (Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986). This coincided with, and brought into focus, increased amounts of research and discourse on space and spatiality — what Edward Soja called the ‘spatial turn’ (Winkler, et al., 2012). Space has always been there, but merely as the backdrop or setting where events unfolded — as a sort of container for historical and temporal events to occur in. From the late 1960s onwards, with the spatial turn, space as a concept became increasingly relevant in cultural studies and literary studies, moving away from its previous notion as undialectical, fixed, immobile (Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986). The new understanding was shaped by the idea of space as a social product — not merely a container but the outcome of human and social relations — a lived space. These insights help us understand that since space is a social product, individuals leave

their mark on space — they etch spaces with their own version of power relations. Consequently, spatial forms reflect the power dynamics in a society.

Gaston Bachelard's pioneering work *The Poetics of Space* (1994) was one of the first studies that placed space within the frameworks of literature and human perception, stressing the subject-oriented interrelations of space and spatial representations. He brought the individual into focus in the discourse on physically empty, three-dimensional space. This laid the foundation for other theorists to follow. Henri Lefebvre, in *The Production of Space* (1991), proposed the spatial triad — three conceptual levels of what space is composed of — objective space (spatial practices), conceived space (representations of space) and lived space (space of representation). This first category is neutral space, a given — the realm in which planners and architects work. The second category is mental space, of ideologies, not bound by physical space. The last category, lived space, is the result of the first two coming together. For example, how the world is (objective space) and how we make sense of it and how we imagine how it should be (conceived space). This is the realm in which the world actually works out — where social relations take place and where we actively experience it in everyday life. These three levels of spatiality influence each other to form social space, thus making space both a product and productive. Human beings structure their experiences by projecting spatiality and temporality upon the world, though each of us does not have the same amount of access and power to contribute to this process. Thus, though space is empirically real, it can be comprehended only through thought. Lefebvre's work on space ought to be understood in its overarching Marxist-humanist context, as a critique of capitalism and the social relations of production that it perpetuates (Roberts, 2012).

## Literary Representations of Space

Bachelard's and Lefebvre's conceptions of space are of consequence in literary studies because they acknowledge the significance of symbolic (or in some cases literary) representations of space. They allow representations of spaces to be brought into the larger discourse on spatiality and spatial studies by giving literary representations a crucial position in the overall interdisciplinary study of space, and throwing light on the fact that literary spaces are never just blueprints of physical spaces, they are not objective. Literary spaces are active in the production of space.

Literary representations are made when the objective city space interacts with the individual, with human/social relations, to produce subjective experiences of and in the space.

The way the city is written about has undergone a very significant change in the last several decades. Early texts were based on the notion that cities in literature were almost like blueprints of real cities, objective representations through the written word. However, like the notion of space as a mere container/setting for history became obsolete, so did this notion. Andreas Mahler, a German scholar whose anthology *Stadt-Bilder* (1999) has become a pioneering study when it comes to literary cities, blames the “illusion of mimesis” for this outdated notion. In *Stadt-Bilder*, Mahler takes a new approach and proposes a distinction between *Stadttext* (text about a city) and *Textstadt* (literary city). *Stadttexte*, as defined by Mahler, are texts in which urban space is a dominant theme and in which the city does not merely function as a setting or backdrop, but is an essential part of the text. *Textstädte*, in turn, are not cities of the real world, but fictional cities that create their own intra-textual reality.

For example, Salman Rushdie, who has written extensively about Bombay/Mumbai, making it a very vibrant character in his stories, not just a setting, makes the point that in their writing they are creating different Bombays of and from their imagination (Shahani, 1995). It is fashioned in the writer’s own image, and stops being a mere geographical entity — it becomes the realm of imagination. Similarly, the narrative doesn’t record history objectively, it fictionalises it. Studying the city through literary texts has the potential to throw up very interesting perspectives because most people have their own personal experiences with/in cities, and this is conveyed to and understood by the reader through very subjective impressions of city life. Imbuing social space with meaning is an essential part of social reality. And urban space is almost always constructed in literature, as descriptions of urban experiences and urban spaces are never objective.

## The City in the Novel

Richard Lehan’s *The City in Literature* (1994) is a follow up to Lewis Mumford’s *The City in History* (1968), and is an ambitious overview of German, Russian, French, English and American literary traditions. The fundamental thesis in this book is a stark and obvious contradiction in literary texts — he sees the rural and natural, pastoral landscapes as related to religion and myth,

and the urban/city as the realm of reason, commerce and empiricism which suppresses the mythic and the mysterious. Cities in antiquity were still linked to the rural and pastoral, and took their meaning from religion and myth. But with increased urbanisation, city dwellers began to become more and more disconnected from the countryside, and thus cities came to be characterised by all that is associated with the Enlightenment — rationalism, empiricism, belief in progress. This became the basis for the modern city.

Georg Simmel, in *The Metropolis and Mental Life* (1971), emphasises the previously long-held notion that cities are alienating and apathetic to social relations. At the same time, he also stresses that it is in cities that the individual, as his/her own person, is able to assert their uniqueness and productivity. Kevin McNamara (2014) too reads the city as a site which allows individuals the freedom and anonymity to remake themselves in line with their desires. The appreciation of difference is what leads to the extension of equal rights across the divides of class, gender and ethnicity — a fundamental difference between urban and pastoral societies. However, Lehan ignores this emancipatory side of the urban. He makes a case for looking at the development of cities/urbanism parallel to the different stages in literature. As the city grew, certain forms of literature gave way to others. As the commercial city gave way to the industrial and finally the post-industrial city, romantic and comic realism was replaced by naturalism and modernism first, by post-modernism later. In each individual case, the literary movement is seen to make further inroads into Enlightenment assumptions. Of all the recent work done on city literature, Lehan's book best brings into focus the changing interaction (over the course of the last two and a half centuries) between literature on the one hand and ideology on the other.

In *City Codes: Reading the Modern Urban Novel* (Wirth-Nesher, 1996), the author qualifies some universally held notions about literary modernism and the city. Her premise is that representations of the city depend on the cultural and social position of the subject. Consequently, there are as many tropes of the city as there are troping minds, she says. Taking into consideration eight different texts as case studies, she writes about cities as places that promise plenitude but deliver inaccessibility. And by extension the urban dweller faces a never-ending series of gaps and partial visibilities. Cities are scintillating and attractive sites, where meaning is produced as a result of the tension between mental maps/mental appropriation and inaccessibility. In such a fluid environment in modern times, Wirth-Nesher argues that no homemaking is possible. According to Mikhail

Bakhtin (Bemong, et al., 2010), the home is the prime chronotype of the upper-class novel of the 1800s. However, modernism brings with it a certain displacement that makes safe homemaking a difficult ideal to achieve. The cosiness of the rural/pastoral, domestic surroundings is taken over by an in-between place — half-private, half-public.

In *Writing the City: Eden, Babylon and the New Jerusalem* (Preston & Simpson-Housley, 2002), the editors view the city as a kind of vessel that holds human experience. A city is an aggregation not just in demographic, economic or political terms, but also in terms of feeling and emotion. It is thus more than its built environment, more than the sum of its parts. A city is an experience — to be lived, suffered, understood. The book is a collection of essays that try to see the city through the eyes of people who experience it and not just through the eyes of geography. While always a unique literary symbol, the city has gained importance in modernity — the ways in which a culture writes about its cities can tell us a great deal about the fears and aspirations of its people. Many powerful fictional images have their roots in the real politics of history — both positive and negative. Since antiquity the rural and the urban have been read in diametric opposition, more often than not to an advantage of the former. Cities have been seen as sites of guile, falsehood, apathy, while the rural is associated with more straightforward, positive and desirable values (Eppley, 2018).

## Literary Cities

As much as writers have shaped and influenced cities, cities too have contributed to the making of many writers — even the ones who are critical of the values that the city embodies. Samuel Johnson, for example, was a satirist of the human vanity he saw around himself in eighteenth century London. However, it is difficult to imagine his trajectory as a writer develop outside of the great metropolis, which is what fired and nourished his imagination (Lehan, 1994). It is important to study how the nineteenth-century writers approached or negotiated the city because of the unique relationship between the rise of the city and the rise of the novel as a literary form. The rise of the urban, the city, is considered “inseparable from various kinds of literary movements — in particular the development of the novel and subsequent narrative modes: comic realism, romantic realism, naturalism, modernism and postmodernism” (Lehan, 1994, p. 3). Richard Lehan persuasively argues that transformations in the structure and function of cities influenced the form

of the urban novel. He links developments in urban literature with developments of the city, ascribing various narrative methods and trends to historical stages of urbanisation.

In the last fifty years the city as a topic or as a location for literature has received increased interest from a thematic point of view — from a fairly abstract consideration of the role of urban literature in history to very specific case studies, these recent studies cover a wide spectrum. But all of them have one commonality — they all define the city as a ‘space pervaded by meaning’ (Verslyus, 2000). These works bring out the sense of lived experience in the city along with a discussion on how in city literature the imagination grapples with a man-made environment.

Our efforts to understand our society would be remiss if we prioritised literature for adults over literature for children, purely on the basis that it is meant for children, not taken seriously as individuals. Children’s earliest interaction with their society is through picturebooks — whether wordless or with text. Through art and image, children learn to read characters, events and even spaces (Albers, 2008), and make sense of the world and the people in it through this reading. Many writers have argued that the visual too is central to the cultural construction of social life in contemporary societies (Rose, 2007). Picturebooks pack in more information about space because of the dual modes of communication — through text and through image. Given the prominence that visual imagery plays in children’s literature, a visual analysis is necessary to understanding how space and place are constructed and represented in children’s literature. Picturebooks carry immense potential to represent the urban experience. By considering some contemporary picturebooks published in India, in the following chapters, I will illustrate how social identity plays a significant role in our experience of the urban.

# Defining Picturebooks

While there is no dearth of scholarship on books for adults, there is painfully little on children's literature. Whether for adults or for children, all texts are socially constructed — by the authors and illustrators, based on their experiences and aspirations — and also interpreted/understood similarly — by the readers, based on their experiences and aspirations. They do not exist in a neutral space; they are situated in a particular context. Therefore, turning to picturebooks is a good way of understanding the politics and workings of our society — as an alternative archive of history, and as a 'checklist' of our collective aspirations and dreams. In this chapter I will present the various definitions of the picturebook, and how they all acknowledge the existence of two sign-systems — text and illustration. I then move on to the dynamics between text and visuals in picturebooks, exploring how they create meaning, separately and together. Next, I make a case for picturebooks as visual art — affordable, accessible and the medium through which children are able to make sense of the world around them. I take the example of *Mukand and Riaz* (Sabnani, 2007), a postcolonial picturebook about the partition of India (and creation of Pakistan) in the year 1947, to illustrate how social reality is mirrored by spatial politics. I move on to the use of picturebooks as pedagogy, and how the modern Indian picturebook has evolved from nationalist discourse on the ideal Indian child. After exploring the frequent and conventional motifs and tropes that feature in picturebooks, I conclude with a discussion of the emergence of the postmodern picturebook, where a part of the responsibility of meaning-making is transferred from the author/illustrator to the reader.

## What is a Picturebook?

Multiple definitions of the picturebook abound. A picturebook is a “book in which the story depends on the interaction between written text and image and where both have been created with a conscious aesthetic intention” (Arizpe & Styles, 2003, p. 22). A picturebook is not simply a book that happens to have pictures (Sipe, 1998). Two defining features are brevity (typically thirty-two pages long) and a picture-to print ratio heavily favouring pictures (Nodelman, 2002). Picture-book illustrations function differently from pictures hanging on a gallery wall. Print and pictures work together to tell the story with ‘synergy’ (Sipe, 1998). While the pictures often assume more than a



supporting role, the synergy created by print—picture interaction can take multiple forms. One form is symmetry. Books that are symmetrical are those in which the words and pictures tell the same story with relatively few counterpoint details.

Over the last few decades scholars have defined the picturebook in various ways with significant, even if subtle, differences. Common and central to all definitions is the idea that in a picturebook, a story is told through two ‘sign-systems’ (Martinez & Harmon, 2012). This makes it important to understand that the relationship between text and illustrations is significant and worthy of serious study. Both text and illustration serve the primary purpose of producing and conveying meaning, but each does it in different ways and to varying degrees. The pictures are more than just illustrative. Traditionally, words have conveyed better the temporal meaning — the sequence of events that takes the story forward in a linear narrative. Images, on the other hand, are thought to convey spatial information — including, but not limited to, the setting of the story — and evoke emotional response (Kiefer, 1994). Thus, by definition, the very nature of picturebooks requires readers to not only process two different kinds/sources of information simultaneously, but also integrate them in order to make sense of the narrative — in some cases text may carry primary story information, and in some others illustration may carry primary narrative information (Lewis, 2001) (Golden, 2008). In some books, this may be equally divided or there may be no text at all, as in the case of wordless picturebooks which started off as beginner books for babies, but are increasingly gaining popularity and legitimacy as books for adults too. While reading picturebooks, readers must be able to decode two sources of information — written and pictorial — each experienced in a different way. Textual information is processed in a sequential manner, word after word, while pictorial information is typically taken in all at once, simultaneously (Martinez & Harmon, 2012) (Sipe, 1998) (Schwarz, 1982).

Martinez and Harmon (2012) examined thirty picturebooks for younger readers and thirty for older readers, on different criteria, to determine how picture and text work together to develop plot, character, setting and mood. They found that though it was in younger children’s books that illustrations played a major role in developing each literary element, and in older readers’ books illustrations played a dominant role in conveying information about setting, mood and emotions, it was clear that illustrations and text work in diverse ways, in what is a complex relationship, underscoring the need for critical engagement with narrative (both text and illustration) as a vital

element in children's literature. Through this study they also make the argument that irrespective of the intended age of the reader, reading picturebooks is different from reading narratives that are serviced only through text; text and visual are processed in distinct ways — text in a linear fashion, word after word, and image simultaneously (Martinez & Harmon, 2012).

Stephen Roxburgh (1984) notes that there is a definite gap in research being done on the narrative function of illustrations, separate from the narrative function of text. Defining plot as a sequential, dynamic element in the narrative, he proposes that any literary element that is dynamic becomes part of the plot. Spatial art presents its material simultaneously in a random order, giving us the impression that it does not contribute to the plot. However, two or more such random frames, when placed in a sequential order, produce meaning and contribute to the plot, because together they are dynamic. Quoting Scholes, Phelan and Kellogg from *The Nature of Narrative* (Scholes, et al., 2006), he draws a parallel between similarly produced plot points in moving images — as in a motion picture — and the illustrations in a picturebook.

Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott (2006), writing extensively about the significance of text and illustration in the development of both setting and character in picturebooks, note that while setting can be conveyed through both text and illustration, the visual medium is particularly effective in conveying information about the setting, as also subtle features of characters, through poses, gestures, facial expressions, where words might be heavy and verbose. Moebius (1990) and Nodelman (2002) go one step further and discuss the many semiotic elements that have potential to convey meaning about character through colour codes and positionality.

More recently, the traditional notion of a picturebook, as being appropriate only for young children, has undergone a change. Picturebooks have diversified dramatically in terms of both content and form, to make themselves suitable to reading by adults as well. In today's definition, they are no longer 'dumbed down' books meant for the very young. They address themes, and in ways, considered taboo previously. As Joseph Stanton (2005) points out, the plots of many children's picturebooks often involve radical and unusual experiments dealing with introducing 'excess, indeterminacy, and boundary-breaking', even if in gentler and more insidious ways than in books for adults.

While the emergence of these categories of picturebooks might be recent, one cannot ignore the fact that image-making is the ‘mode of our untutored thinking, and stories are its earliest products’ (Langer, 1991). A good example to illustrate this would be cave paintings that have been an ongoing tradition since the beginning of human civilisation. Picturebooks are then, one might argue, only an extension of this human characteristic that expresses a need to represent aspects of the human culture and race through image — an artist’s need to convey meaning through visual symbols (Kiefer, 1994).

## Picturebooks as Visual Art

On the one hand, there are very different definitions of the picturebook, and on the other there are arguments for treating the picturebook not simply as literature, but as visual art. Sylvia and Kenneth Marantz (1995) were among the first scholars to argue that picturebooks should not be treated as word-dominated works of literature, but as a form of visual art, and must therefore be experienced as a visual entity. Barbara Bader (1976) too suggests that the picturebook must be seen as an art form, because it “hinges on the interdependence of pictures and words, on the simultaneous display of two facing pages, and on the drama of the turning of the page.”

Extending David Lewis’s (2001) argument, Stanton (2005) writes that picturebooks are more poetic than prosaic. The relative brevity of picturebooks allows for the intense manipulation of form, and also offers great prospects for symbolism, irony, and insight, and puts this down to the artistic advantage that the genre makes possible. Image and text do more than just explaining the other. They come together to bounce off each other and convey greater meaning than either can independently (Bader, 1976) (Martinez & Harmon, 2012).

We can make a case for picturebooks as not only great art, but also affordable art (Stanton, 2005). Picturebooks offer great nourishment to most in our society who are starved of art. They often imbibe and resonate with the urban settings that people inhabit, making them ‘come alive’. They are among the most easily available sources of art for most families, both in terms of affordability and access. They are often cheap (relative to pieces of art), and easily available in schools and libraries, at booksellers, the homes of neighbours and friends, and are mobile, making them easy to share and exchange. The pursuit of art, whether as a hobby or more seriously, is considered a

luxury, an elite pastime, especially with the working and middle classes in India. In such an atmosphere most families might not step into art galleries or enrol their children in art classes. However, the same families would buy their children picturebooks, perhaps not entirely realising their potential or value as art, but only because picturebooks are affordable and are known to improve their children's cognition and other skills, making them the only form of sophisticated art that many families might consume on a regular basis. Stanton (2005) also makes a case for valuing picturebooks as an end in themselves, rather than as an aid to cognition or reading skills. Pictures make books more desirable, but they must also be treated as ends unto themselves, because if they were merely to serve as aids to comprehension, there would be no need for them to be as stunning and of high quality as they almost invariably are.

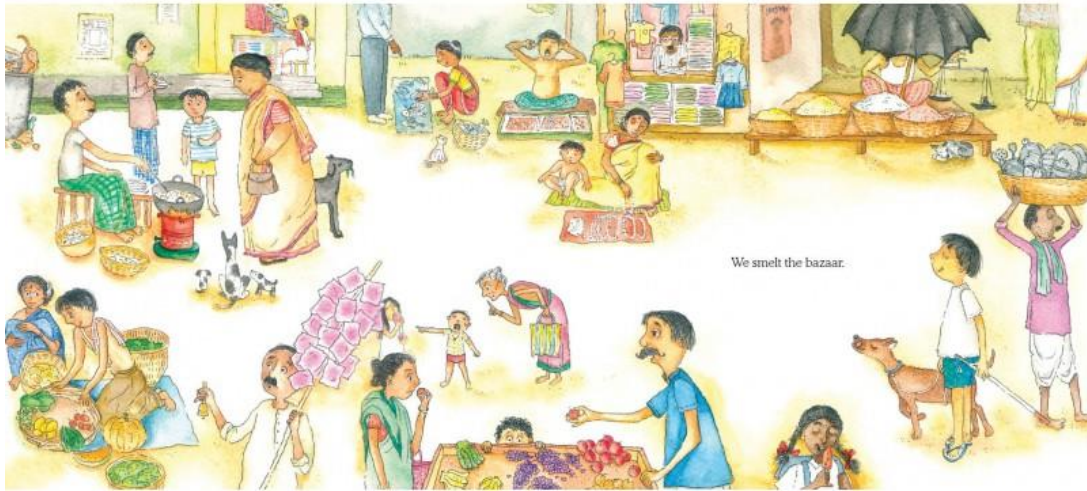
Today picturebooks are gaining recognition and significance as books not just for young children but also for adults and people of all age groups. However, they are still primarily made for children — through visual imagery in literature, children get a sense of the world by 'reading' characters, setting, events and emotions (Albers, 2008). Most often, children begin this process much before they can read text or speak. They recognise patterns and make associations and assumptions about people from purely visual stimuli. They begin to make sense of the world through looking and seeing (Albers, 2008). Therefore, in order to understand what they are seeing and how they are making impressions of the world, it is important to study the representations made in children's books by the people creating those images — the way that illustrators perceive their world determines what children see in a picturebook and what impressions they make from it.

Moreover, the visual is increasingly becoming a very significant mode of relaying and reading information, even for adults (Albers & Harste, 2007) (Kist, 2005). It is through infographics, photographs and other kinds of visual data that a large number of people consume the news, building beliefs about the world. Children or adults, there is no doubt that with decreasing attention spans and increasing use of gadgets with screens, the visual is perhaps the most important medium of disseminating information — the 'new text'. Thus, as with the written word in earlier times, it is important to understand the structures that exist within images that make up our world, and to interrogate these structures for the relationships that they make up. Just as the written word is formed on the basis of assumptions, so too is the image.

## Picturebook Dynamics

Among more recent definitions of picturebooks is one that places equal emphasis on both the text and the pictures in a book, which come together in such a way that without either the complete meaning may not be conveyed. Wolfenbarger and Sipe (2007) argue that picturebooks must be studied as a unique visual and literary art form. They make a case for calling picturebooks ‘picturebook texts’ noting that sometimes pictures and text work in such an interrelated manner, so closely, in conveying spatial and temporal information, that they ‘collide’. The text and the pictures interact in such a way that neither is overpowered by the other, and new meaning is created thus — and that part of the pleasure of reading a picturebook arises from this collision. Recent scholarship also focuses on the dynamic between text and pictures in picturebooks — to what degree each contributes to meaning making. Text and pictures often don’t tell the same story, and it is this ‘dissonance’ that draws the readers in, who, in their reading of the text, resolve this dissonance. The experience of reading in which words draw out the inherent meaning in illustration and draw the reader’s attention to the art, while simultaneously allowing the illustrations to colour the text with specificity — of colour, texture, mood, form and shape — which words might otherwise lack, is termed ‘interanimation’ (Wolfenbarger & Sipe, 2007).

*A Walk with Thambi* (Karthik, 2017) is a recent picturebook which strikingly leverages this dynamic. Written in the first person, it describes a walk taken by a little boy and his dog, and their enduring bond. The text is simple and tells a straightforward story which is gently contrasted by the illustrations, by Proiti Roy, which offer supplementary information and vivid sensory descriptions and visual details that are not part of the text — a walking stick in the boy’s hand, the dog guiding his friend — giving us clues that the boy is blind. Crucially, the illustrations also deliver the punchline — it is only in the last page, from the pictures, can we tell that the narrator is not the boy but the little dog!



*Figure 1 A Walk with Thambi: the text and the pictures interact in a unique way*

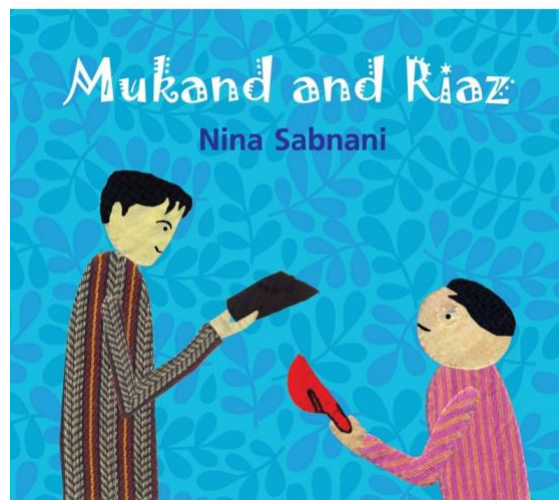
In an essay about the difference between prose picturebooks and poetry picturebooks, Andrea Schwenke Wyile (2017) draws on the work of David Lewis (2001) in approaching picturebooks not just through taxonomy but through their ecology as well, which focuses on the ‘reciprocal relationship of words and pictures in picturebooks’ and accounts for how all the elements and aspects of pictures and text come together, along with the reader, to create a visual poetry of sorts. Picturebook ecology comprises several layers, all of which depend on interrelated forms of space: the first relates to the page — its size, orientation, margins, etc — and the second is story space — its setting and other spatial and temporal information. These two are necessary for the creation of a third layer, called narrative space, which is a result of the reader’s interaction of the tangible and intangible aspects and elements of the physical space of the page.

## Postcolonial Picturebooks

The renewed focus on space and its relationship with narrative has allowed for a dialogue between those concerned with (fictional) representation of postcolonial spaces and those interested in the ‘lived spaces’ of postcolonial experiences — how place is produced and reproduced in fictional postcolonial spaces (Bieger & Maruo-Schroeder, 2016). There is a significant growing interest in how the idea that space is not neutral or passive, interacts with narrative, given that there is an undeniable inescapability of space in everything we do. Therefore, it is important that we unpack literary representations of space for how they begin to become social practices that play a role in

the production of space and place. Simple, everyday cultural practices like telling and retelling a story, especially one that is of cultural significance, become tools in the production of the very context in which those stories are being told, and in which we observe and study them. Marginalised communities including those in postcolonial countries are increasingly telling their stories through different forms of art, going beyond the traditional, and unconventional types of narratives — picturebooks, memoir, travelogue, etc. (Wylie, 2005), as a critical means of expressing philosophies of place.

*Mukand and Riaz* (Sabnani, 2007) is a story about shared histories told through a shared craft. Set against the background of the partition of India (and creation of Pakistan) in 1947, it tells the story of Mukand's (Sabnani's father) childhood friendship with Riaz in pre-partition Karachi (Figure 2). After Mukand's family leaves Karachi, the two friends never meet again but every time he sees a cap his friend gave him, he thinks of Riaz. Originally an animated film, the illustrations in this book are done using the art of women's applique work that is common to Gujarat in India and Sindh in Pakistan. The text is straightforward and simple, as are descriptions of the everyday life in Karachi under British rule, and its spatiality — the harbour, the bonesetter's workshop, a favourite bakery in the market, the gurudwara.



*Figure 2 Mukand and Riaz: cover*

Through the shared craft of applique, Sabnani tells a deeply moving story about the lived experience of partition, and imbues those spaces with many layers of meaning. Thus, literature is

not merely a reflection of a certain place at a certain time — it is an important part of the construction of the social reality of that place, for all time (Shi & Zhu, 2018). Literature constructs the urban as much as the urban informs literature — as Massey (2005, p. 9) notes, “space is a simultaneity of stories so far.” By telling the story through applique, Sabnani adds value to her investigations of a place by ‘other-than-written’ accounts (Thomson, 2013) — adding texture, depth and context. Artists, as much as authors and illustrators, ought to be seen as cultural producers (Beswick, et al., 2015), who intervene in spatial production both consciously and unconsciously, via their cultural practices. Picturebooks, then, can be seen as cultural products as they carry within them a sense of the time and society in which they were produced (Meunier, 2013), conveying a representation of the world in which they are birthed. And as cultural products, picturebooks are a suitable means by which we can understand and analyse the society which they represent.

In *How Picturebooks Work* (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006) the authors posit picturebooks as a unique art form because they are based on the combination of two levels of communication — the visual and the verbal. As a new art form, there is scattered research about picturebooks, with few studies focusing on the dynamics of word and image — how the two forms of communication work together to create a form that is unlike any other. Often, picturebooks have been studied only in the context of art history, where their design and technique are brought into focus. Such studies have ignored the sequential nature of narration involved in picturebooks, and have reduced them to a work of graphic art only — when the pictures are taken out of context, their relationship to the narrative text is not considered, resulting in a lopsided and incomplete view of what the picturebook represents. On the other hand, some approaches have considered picturebooks as an integral part of the children’s literary canon, restricting literary analysis to specific themes and issues — ideology, gender, and so on. The visual aspect is ignored. Some other studies have placed predominant focus on picturebooks for education — socialisation and language acquisition — and their role in the developmental psychology of the child reader.

## Picturebooks in Pedagogy

In Maria Nikolajeva’s introduction, as editor, to *Aspects and Issues in the History of Children’s Literature* (Nikolajeva, 1995) she notes that while children’s literature has been the preoccupation



of researchers for a considerable period of time, it has been in one of two contexts: either as pedagogy or in relation to society (where the child is seen as a mini-adult with children's books serving as instruction manuals for a future role in society). Children's literature has scarcely been studied as literature. In exploring its history as literature, two important issues crop up — a) is there a significant difference between children's literature and general literary history?, i.e. does children's literature follow a similar trajectory of the ancient age, middle ages, renaissance, enlightenment and modernism?; b) is the history of children's literature ethnocentric? Is it national or international — does it reflect a country's national condition, influencing its themes and genres?

In an essay (Shavit, 1995) in this edited volume Shavit argues that most children's literature follows a universal structure, noting that the same milestones of development recur in children's literature in a way that goes beyond national boundaries and across periods of time, involving similar cultural forces and institutions. Thus, historically, children's literature served the purpose of education and ideology, where children were seen as homogenous adults-in-the-making in need of instruction for their future roles in society. Disagreements and battles over what children were supposed to read and what they wanted to read led to the creation of a comparatively heterogenous and stratified canon. For example, fairy tales were considered inappropriate and dangerous, and children were discouraged from reading them, but were immensely popular nonetheless; religious educators, who were responsible for the pedagogic training of children, saw potential in this popularity of fairy tales and tapped into it (Shavit, 1995) (Zipes, 2000) (Zipes, 2012) (Grenby, 2014). As a result their literary model, motifs and tropes, were transferred to instructive tales where there was a clear distinction between characters — beasts and otherworldly creatures were imbued with negative traits like dishonesty and greed, while everything good and ideal was vested in the human character that the child receiving instruction was supposed to emulate.

This is similar to the binary opposition of good and evil one sees in the early children's books of India. Most children's literature in the Indian subcontinent was oral until about two hundred years ago, and even then, there were very few books produced till after Independence seven decades ago. Early books for children drew heavily, almost entirely, from the mythological and folk traditions of the country, and with time began to carry within them a nationalistic spirit (Sheoran, 1975). As the population grew tired of colonialism and began to fight for self-determination, nationalistic instruction began to seep into children's books and literature as well. As future adults,

children were seen as having the potential to play a significant role in overthrowing the colonisers, and thus it was important to provide the kind of the instruction that would instil in them the right values — patriotism and national pride.

I extend Partha Chatterjee's (1989) argument about women's role in the subcontinent's anti-colonial movement, in that women were useful to the movement in safeguarding, against colonial attack, all that was considered pious and sacred. i.e. the home and private sphere, to the context of children's literature. There was a selective nationalist import of western education and modernism to help women safeguard the home against colonial attack — reinforcing traditional gender roles to protect and nourish the private sphere as a means of fighting colonial oppression and not let it sully the sacred domestic sphere. So too children were encouraged to read literature and educate themselves as a means of ensuring that they would use this knowledge to safeguard their traditional values and morals. Instilling in children a deep sense of their tradition and who they were, what values to place above others, through literature, was supposed to ensure that they grew up feeling patriotic and with the strict belief that western influence was alright in the public sphere, but not when it came to things that were closest to the heart — religion, home, family, etc.

## The Modern Indian Picturebook

This trend had continued for a few decades after independence till the recent renaissance of children's literature in India. Foremost among the source of mythological and religious stories for young Indians, especially those growing up between 1970 and the early 2000s were the *Amar Chitra Katha* (Immortal Picture Story) illustrated comics published by India Book House in Bombay (Pritchett, 1997), which carried Indian stories in English (apart from other Indian languages) — a first of sorts. These comics were published in order to 'educate' the Indian child about their own tradition and cultural heritage. There is a strong narrative voice that is nationalist (consistently defended on economic and political grounds) and which makes a strong distinction between the negative 'them' and the positive 'us' which must be made stronger through a sense of community and bonding. The British, as the negative 'them', are depicted as arrogant and insensitive, while the Indians are depicted in stereotypical ways — poor, with darker skin tones, sacrificing, patriotic, often exoticized, saintly and homogenous.

While immensely successful, because of their role in educating Indian children about their own history, the books provide a view of the past that is inadequate, homogenous and (perhaps as a product of the times) reinforces certain stereotypes. While Pritchett notes that the editorial board of the comics took great care to be sensitive in their depictions, both in text and in picture, especially of lower castes and religious minorities, she also recognises that the books present a version of history that, however well-meaning towards the marginalised, is written from a Hindu middle class, Brahminical, cis-hetero-male perspective (Rao, 2001), and thus do not give voice or space to the marginalised for self-determination. Women, even in the modern history comics, are glorified so long as they perform their role in the domestic sphere as mothers and nurturers, sacrificing and embodying traditional patriarchal notions of womanhood. The books present national integration and patriotism through a decidedly Hindu lens, with the larger communal conflicts that are a very real part of India's history and present, brushed aside. They glorify, without comment, an idea of India that is built on Hindutva ideals (Subramanian, 2019), and present a version of the independence movement and modern Indian history that is convenient and selective.

## Motifs and Tropes

Maria Nikolajeva (1995) makes a case for exploring adequate methods in other fields of research since a historical approach to children's literature tends to inevitably be descriptive, as the field lags terribly behind general literary criticism. Employing the semiotics of culture, she interprets the history of children's literature as a succession of changing cultural codes — children's literature representing a system of codes that is different from those found in adult, mainstream literature. She argues that such an approach makes it easier to explain the evolution of certain patterns that are often found in children's literature: adventure, journey, homecoming, happy ending. William Moebius (1990) too lists the common motifs found in children's literature and how they always have something to do with entry and exit, an in-between space — signifying thresholds of experience, both for the protagonist and the (child) reader, implying social change and growing up.

Earlier, conventional picturebooks were more straightforward in aspects like plot development and progression. In one kind of picturebooks, the plot development and the protagonist's journey are circular — starting at home, an adventure makes the child (or adult protagonist) depart from home,

encounter plot twists and hurdles, conquer these hurdles and make their return to the home. While more common in adventure themed books, she says, this is the case in most books. The purpose of this circular journey is two-fold: the maturation of the child (both the protagonist and the reader). Returning home at the end of a story signifies a sense of safety and security.

*A Walk with Thambi* (Karthik, 2017) is a typical example of this circular journey — Thambi and his dog are back home after an exciting, muddy walk, with Thambi's mother lovingly giving them both a good wash with the hose. This circular journey is evident in *Where's That Cat?* (Padmanabhan, 2009), by the renowned artist Manjula Padmanabhan, too. A little girl, Minnie, comes home from school and can't find her cat Pooni. She steps out of her home and into the streets — there she meets fortune-teller ladies, fruit-sellers, middle aged people carrying umbrellas, a group of schoolgirls, hawkers, all busy navigating a dynamic city with all its wall art, honking vehicles, urban cows chewing newspaper and plastic, and so on.

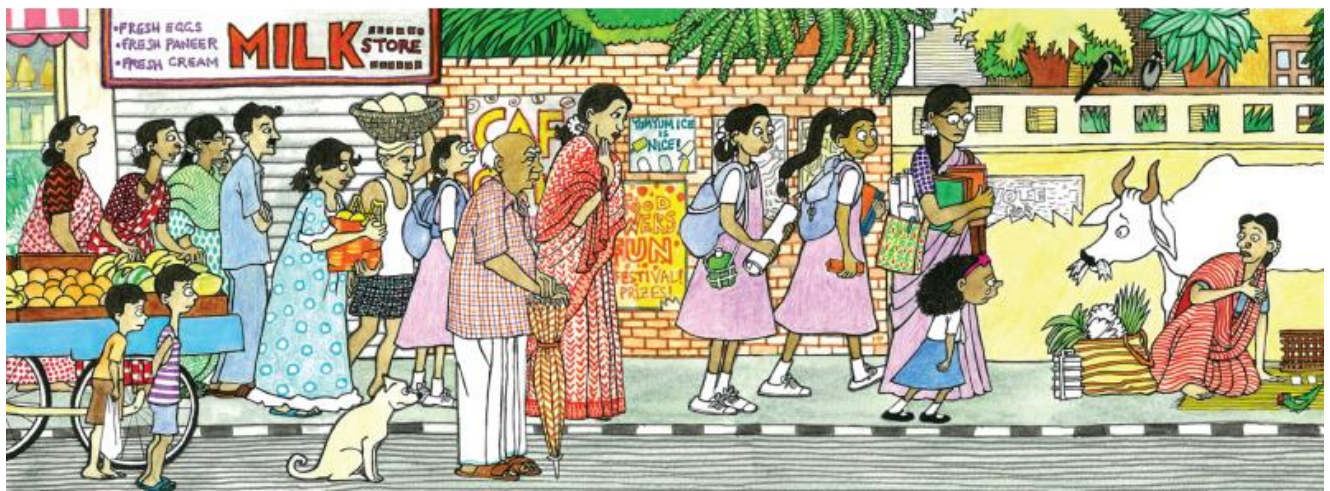
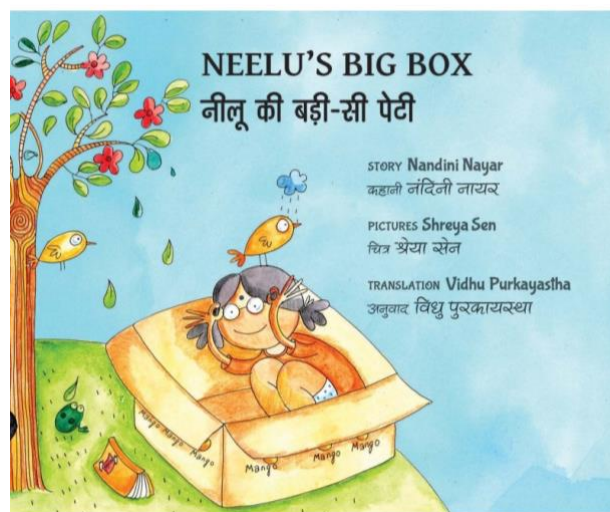


Figure 3 *Where's That Cat?: Minnie searching the roads for Pooni*

She asks each of them whether they have seen her little orange cat, and they say no. But she has to go home for her mother might start worrying. As she enters home disappointed, her mother says that someone is waiting for her. That's when she spots the little orange cat, Pooni, ready to lick Minnie's relieved face. Minnie comes home after an adventurous search mission on the streets, to be reunited with her cat. Here, the return to home completes the cyclical journey and leads Minnie and the reader to a place of security and comfort, with a happy ending.

In the second kind of picturebooks, the journey is linear — the plot evolves in such a way that it begins at one point, takes the protagonist on a journey, and ends at some other point. There is no returning home; the protagonist finishes one adventure and journeys further on. Typically, these stories are more open ended, and leave scope for continuing adventures. *Neelu's Big Box* (Nayar, 2015) is a bilingual picturebook about a little girl, Neelu, who finds an empty cardboard box. She decides to make a big, strong fort with it. Picking up sundry items that are lying around the house, she imagines her big, strong fort coming together. The fruit bowl is her soldier's helmet, and her grandparents' walking sticks are her swords.



*Figure 4 Neelu's Big Box: cover*

Just as she is setting out on her big adventure, she trips and falls — and the box becomes flat. Neelu takes it out into the garden and refashioning her soldier's helmet and swords into a captain's hat and oars, and reimagines the flat box as a boat. While the setting remains somewhat constant (inside the house and out in the garden) throughout, there is a linear progression in Neelu's imagination, and she moves on from one adventure (where she is converting a cardboard box into a fort) to another (where she is imagining herself setting off into the seas on her boat).

## Postmodern Picturebooks

Jill May (1997) recognises that critics of modern children's literature focus on the political, cultural and intertextual implications found in children's books. The reader and their experience,

contingent on social identity, politics, lived reality, must be considered while trying to understand how a book creates an aesthetic experience, she argues. It is widely acknowledged today that since most children's books are written by adults for an imagined child, the books need to be understood as cultural signs of adult social and political standards and socialisation practices (Stephens, 1992), much like early modern picturebooks with a set agenda for educational, or, as in the case of Indian books, nationalistic instruction.

However, more recent picturebooks transfer a part of the responsibility of creating a book onto the reader — typically these books challenge (often adult, but also institutionalised) authority, are non-linear, are self-aware and self-mocking and do not rely as heavily on the problem—solution adventure pattern/trope that traditional picturebooks employ. Bette P. Goldstone (2004) defines such books as postmodern picturebooks, and argues that they represent a new subgenre of picturebooks. Such books are unconventional in one or more aspects, and it is this unconventionality that draws the reader in and invites them to “co-create” the book along with the author and the illustrator. As young readers, based on their own experiences, relate to the story and make real-life connections, they are transformed into active agents of the story, rather than remaining mute spectators like children before them, reading didactic books written by adults. Thus, postmodern picturebooks might act as more accurate mirrors to society than conventional picturebooks. Such picturebooks redefine the notions of child and childhood, vesting more autonomy and power with children, and recognising that they have distinct needs (Shavit, 1995).

If we were to consider postmodern picturebooks (Goldstone, 2004) as a new subgenre which allows for newer elements like a non-linear narrative, unusual settings, and an anti-authoritarian stance, *Red* by Sagar Kolwankar (2018) is a good example. It is a strong, evocative story about armed conflict and its implications on the everyday lives of children. There is no specific setting to the story — it could be anywhere; the author-illustrator employs only blocks of colour on a white background to give a sense of space and setting. Through simple line drawings he depicts a young boy running down winding lanes (blocks of yellow colour) where he and his friends played all the time. He finds a bright red kite on the ground (again, there are only blocks of yellow on the page with a red kite with just a hint of texture) and picks it up. As he runs around with the kite fluttering behind him, there is more depth and happiness on the page, with the blocks of yellow slowly making space for some orange and green. Then as the kite flies higher, there are blue blocks

to signify the sky. Suddenly the sky turns darker, with aeroplanes dropping massive bombs. The next few pages are filled with scary bombs and blocks of red, purple and black, signifying destruction, shock, and doom. The boy picks up his torn kite and as it works its way up into the sky once again, the black and red blocks of colour give way to slightly happier, cooler shades of blue.

Colour is used very powerfully by the author-illustrator to signify not just the setting but also very different emotions in the course of the narrative. Through just blocks of colour and the use of ripped paper the reader is gently nudged to think about how the devastation is not just of homes and lives but also the human spirit. Equally importantly, this is a poignant story about war told from the perspective of a child, whose playtime is suddenly ravaged. The child could be anybody, the setting could be anywhere, and there is no meta-narrative about war and who is good and who is bad. Through simple artistic technique the young reader is encouraged to think about strife and destruction as they know it, and how it might affect their life.



*Figure 5 Red: sudden bombing from the sky*

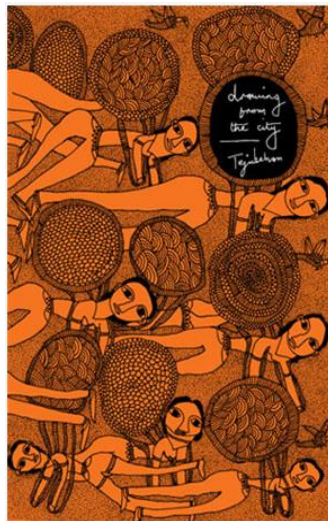
By moving away from the politics of war, the players and the authorities calling for war, Red refocuses the attention on the implications of war on the lives of innocent children, as they see it. Young readers are no longer just mute spectators, they co-create the story (Goldstone, 2004) and take it to whatever conclusion resonates with them, based on their own experiences. Thus, as a postmodern picturebook, Red is not a pedagogic tool by which omniscient adults impart a didactic

message or moral to a passive child (El-Tamami, 2007); it subverts and challenges the traditional adult author — passive child reader relationship. Other postmodern picturebooks too present to the reader many contemplative questions, which conventional picturebooks have traditionally shied away from. As another example of the postmodern picturebook that goads the young reader to think about issues that are typically avoided in children's literature, in the next chapter I will illustrate how gender plays a significant in one's urban experience, and how the freedom of spatial mobility brings with itself other freedoms too.



## Gender and Mobility in *Drawing from the City*

Certain picturebooks are more than just children's books (Hladikova, 2014) — they entertain and engage a wide range of readers depending on what each one of them is looking for, their personal experiences and whether, if at all, they lean more towards the text or the illustrations in the book. *Drawing from the City* (Jogi, 2012) belongs to this category of picturebooks; it is as much for adult readers as it is for children. It can be seen as a cultural product (Meunier, 2013) which carries in itself the time and society in which it was created, representing the world in which it was created.



*Figure 6 Drawing from the City: cover*

In this book Tejubehan draws the story of her journey and her identity, gently challenging gender and social norms in, and through, the urban — a space that is chaotic, daunting and alien at first, but which becomes freeing and transformative. In this chapter I will explore her journey to, and within, a city — negotiating it first as a young village girl, growing up as a teenager in the city, and finally as a married working woman. Living in the peripheries of Ahmedabad and Mumbai, Teju's urban experience is characterised by mobility and movement; everything is on the move — trains, buses, cars, even people are always on the move. It is in this movement that Teju finds herself — I argue that for Teju (and many, many women like her) the urban becomes not just the setting but also the means by which oppressive and limiting societal norms can be challenged.

The book is an illustrated autobiography of Tejubehan Jogi. Teju was born into endemic poverty in a village in north-western India, in a community that lived at the edge of a forest. A railway track passed through their village, where she would spend several hours fascinated with the trains that went to the city. “Take me to the city,” she whispered to a passing train. And one day, after a particularly harsh summer, it did. Her family was forced to move to the city in search of work. It is in the city that Teju grew into a young girl, and married Ganesh Bhai, also a musician like the rest of her family. Unlike most other men in their community, Ganesh Bhai was encouraging of Teju and would coax her to sing with him in the city. Some years later Ganesh Bhai had a chance encounter with Haku Shah, the Gandhian anthropologist. Shah spotted Ganesh Bhai’s talent and commissioned artwork for a restaurant from him, gently helping him make a career as a professional urban folk artist.

Once again, Ganesh Bhai encouraged Teju to join him. She took to pen and paper much more naturally than her husband — initially drawing the legends and myths she grew up with, she went on to drawing the world she saw around herself, creating several books in her unique style (Ghose, 2012). These books act as an archive and history of the Jogi community, to which Teju and Ganesh Bhai belonged.

The Jogis of North India are a semi-nomadic community of traditional, hereditary singers (Meena, 2018). They are professional musicians patronised by local rural communities who invite them for night-long oral storytelling performances as part of religious festivals. Technically, they are a community that follows a particular religious path, but over the centuries they have solidified their status as a distinct caste. Unaware of their history and their nomadic way of life, the British were suspicious of them, believing them to be messengers of the enemy — as a result, they were categorised under the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871, along with several other misunderstood communities. Thus began their journey of social exclusion, and being kept out of the mainstream, which has resulted in them being labelled as ‘backward’. Though ‘criminal tribes’ were de-notified five years after Indian independence, they continue to be excluded from the mainstream, and come under the socio-political category of ‘Other Backward Class’. Even today the Jogis are engaged in traditional musical performances, but several of them also own small plots of agricultural land for sustenance. Those that are more marginalised than others within the community are also engaged in menial labour — working in mines, grazing cattle, tending to village shrines, etc.

The culture of mistrust perpetuated by the former coloniser is so deeply entrenched that even several decades after independence the community continues to be discriminated against, and this manifests not only in social relations but also spatial exclusion. The Jogis typically live on the peripheries of villages and cities, excluded from opportunities and benefits both socially and spatially. As a consequence, there is endemic poverty in the community, and very few opportunities for people, like Tejubehan and Ganesh Bhai, to rise from it. Reflecting the larger patriarchal society that the Jogi community is a part of, they too have strict divisions based on gender — the men are professional singers, while the women only sing at home; the men go to villages and cities “singing about god, love, pain and happiness” (Jogi, 2012). The women are restricted in their mobility and remain at home — taking on the unshared burden of domestic upkeep and child rearing, and usually only go out to collect firewood and other resources.

## Gender and Geography

In a study of rural femininities and its relevance to gender studies and rural geographies, Karen Eppley (2018) argues that visual representations are not neutral or without material effect when it comes to the construction of girlhoods in picturebooks. Her qualitative analysis of twenty-five picturebooks set in contemporary rural America is based on the idea that texts ought to be understood as socially constructed and as socially interpreted by writers and readers living in specific places. While gender is neither independent nor wholly determined only by place, it is certainly connected to place and has a significant role to play in ascribing meaning to place. Therefore, picturebooks too, like all texts, have a significant role to play in the construction or subversion of traditional gender roles — they are not neutral or without significance. And so, it matters what one sees in a picturebook, as in the world around us — visual representations work to construct gender, and its relationship to space, by way of subtle, discrete suggestions about the world around us, with all its inequalities and hierarchical relationships. I base this section on the argument that picturebooks are, therefore, a significant and potent space to question how gender (or other social identity) and place intersect.

Eppley also notes that typically in picturebooks, even if children are shown taking part in gender-neutral activities, adults are almost always engaged in traditionally defined gender-normative work — women’s activities are almost exclusively centred around the home in the picturebooks that

contributed to her study. In *Drawing from the City* too, Tejubehan portrays the women of her village engaged in traditionally feminine activities, confined to the indoors. Their village deity too is a goddess, who the community worships as their nurturer and mother, giving them the resources of the forest for sustenance, like a mother is expected to bear the maximum responsibility for child rearing.

Feminist geographers like Doreen Massey (1994) have argued for long that gender relations vary across space, and are not the same. Geography and gender cross each other in multiple significant ways, with each playing an important role in the construction of the other — particularly, spatial control is a fundamental element in the construction of gender, and helps perpetuate unequal gender relations. Massey offers a historical perspective to support the argument that social identity and unequal power relations are a good starting point to understand the nature and dynamics of social change (Massey, 1994). Throughout history simultaneous patriarchal control of space and identity has been achieved through a distinction between the public and the private, where the public is constructed as the sphere of men, and the private, of women. This distinction makes way for the confinement of women to the domestic sphere, which is coded as female and constructed through associating with it, ideas of birth, care, nourishment, comfort, nostalgia and stability. This coding is visible even in the urban-rural dichotomy, where the masculine urban stands for aggression, chaos, the impersonal, etc. while the feminine rural is seen as comforting, personal, and nurturing (Eppley, 2018). By confining and limiting women to the domestic sphere, where women's politics is reduced to being of consequence only to their role as nurturers, patriarchy ensures the control of both space and personhood — spatial control is achieved through clamping down on mobility, which helps achieve social control of identity as well (Massey, 1994).

In *Drawing from the City*, Tejubehan and the Jogi community are forced to live at the peripheries of the city they move to, because of the community's place in the socio-cultural landscape. They continue to be excluded both socially and spatially — they are kept away from economic opportunities and denied access to the city to which they move after a particularly harsh summer that plunges them deeper into poverty. Teju writes that this is not how she wanted to move to the city — pushed out of their homes, their village to eke out a living. This is not how she imagined the city — they are living at its very edge, under tents in a temporary settlement. As 'unskilled' migrants they exist merely to service the city. And living at the peripheries of the city and working

in the informal sector, they have no legitimate access to the resources, services and spaces of the city.

They are seen as having no ‘right to the city’ (Purcell, 2002), to use Lefebvre’s (1968) term, and are not considered citizens of the very city they service. As lowly paid migrant workers in a capitalist economy, their embodied experiences are furthered by the city’s policy of ‘use and discard’ (Yeoh, 2006). The city abdicates its responsibilities towards them, classifying them as non-citizens. They are forced to move to the city to remake their lives (Harvey, 2008), but are not given a chance to do so, and lose all social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) (Jacobs, 1992) in their dislocation from the village and migration to the city. Particularly, this burden of losing social capital and moving to the city falls unequally on the women (Silvey, 2006) — they face restrictions to their movement, are in completely new surroundings and cut off from the people that made up their lives and with whom they performed everyday chores, developing deep personal bonds.



*Figure 7 Drawing from the City: Teju and her community relegated to the peripheries of the city*

In her illustrations, Teju depicts Jogi families in tents at the edge of the city, in poor living conditions, tending to the ‘house’ and taking care of the children, while the men are (one gathers from their absence in the illustrations) away, performing their music or engaged in menial labour. This gendered separation of the public and private spheres is transgressed as the book progresses. As more and more production activities are outsourced to the peripheries of urban settlements,

capitalism feeds on pre-existing gender relations, forcing this community of traditional singers into the economy as cheap, unskilled labour (Yeoh, 2006).

While this is the general experience of the Jogi community in the city, Teju's urban experience begins to change after her marriage with Ganesh Bhai — a singer like other men from her community, but progressive and encouraging of Teju's talent. Traditionally, metropolitan or urban life is considered a threat to patriarchal control (Massey, 1994) because it places before women an alternative way of living — it offers them entry to another world, a life that is not defined and controlled by the husband or the family. This, patriarchy believes, will come in the way of their willingness to perform domestic roles, and threatens the social and spatial control that is exerted over women. But it is for these very reasons that the urban becomes freeing and transformative for Teju. With the encouragement of her husband she begins to perform as a musician along with him in public. Her mobility is no longer restricted to the household — she goes out to work, each day a different workplace in the city, wherever they are singing.

## Mobility and Migration

Throughout history cities have been understood to be spaces that are created as a result of the consolidation of power — social, cultural, economic, political — because of which there has been a perpetual migration to cities, correlated with places of greater inequality (Yeoh, 2006). Cities are seen as a collection of resources, a centrifugal point for sites of privilege. While cities are seen as modern, intellectual and freeing, the rural is seen as backward, oppressive and 'native' — it is not just a geographical term, it carries meaning extending to socio-cultural distinctions and types of knowledge. As a result, people have always migrated to cities, just like Teju and her family.

While rural-urban migration has been studied extensively from a cis-hetero male perspective, there is an urgent need to study migration from the lens of feminist geography. Feminist studies of migration dismantle dated, canonical approaches to the spatial logic at the centre of migration research. Rachel Silvey (2006) argues that feminist geography makes a case for approaching the socio-spatial aspects of mobility in an intersectional and axiomatic relationship with caste, class, race, religion, disability and citizenship. Heterogenous social identities play a pivotal role in the

unequal geographies of mobility, exclusion and belonging, subverting our understandings and theorisations of power and spatial rootedness.

Migration studies have for very long looked at the benefits to men (and assuming that the benefits are shared equally in a household), ignoring the costs to women. Normative ideas of gender help construct an artificial hierarchy of scales, where ‘larger’ or higher scales like national and international migration are coded as male and ‘smaller’, everyday scales like the household and the body are deemed unimportant and ignored, and thus are implicitly coded female (Silvey, 2006). Such a skewed view not only overvalues the advantages to men from migration, it ignores women’s numerous daily forms of mobility, especially in the global south. In taking a feminist geography approach to migration, we unpack the household as a unified, neutral unit and question the assumption that it is a space of decision making devoid of a power differential, where both men and women are equal. In doing so we move away from the traditional calculation of costs and benefits of migration, where it was assumed that everything is shared equally by the household, and start focusing on the unfair and unequal burden migration places on women’s everyday lives and their bodies.

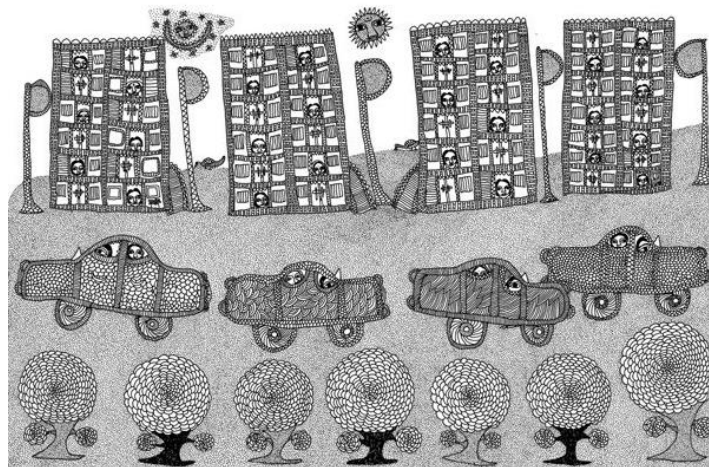
Most accounts of migration, Yeoh (2006) argues, are extremely masculinist. Men are seen as adventurous and entrepreneurial, while women are either missing from the discourse or only seen as appendages to the migrating men — victimised, exoticized and subservient. In putting on record her experiences as a migrant woman Tejubehan offers a counter to migration being viewed as wholly emancipatory — women are caught in unfamiliar entanglements and often exploitative systems with no community support. Her story goes against the typical representation of wives and women in migrant communities — she reclaims the urban space traditionally occupied by men, along with the transformative and liberating potential that migration offers to men.

## Alien City

When Tejubehan moves to the city her first observation is that “everything is on the move” there. She begins documenting the city as she is seeing it — documenting movement through movement — “lines, dots, more lines, more dots.” The city is an alien and alienating space, very different from her village at the edge of the forest. In the village their lives were closely knit with that of

the larger community, and their needs were taken care of, to a large extent, by the forest. They worshipped the forest as a goddess, taking only as much as they needed, and giving the land and water time to replenish. They maintained a non-exploitative relationship with nature, and there was a whole ecosystem at work — trees, water, animals, birds — everything that sustains life was in a harmonious relationship with the other.

In the pages that depict scenes from her village, there is a dynamism in the pictures, and they are full of incidental details that help paint a wholesome, full picture of village life. Though there is economic insecurity, Tejubehan's depiction of other aspects of village life is positive and multi-layered, with families engaged in a variety of activities including work and leisure, socialising, praying — a sense of community and a pastoral spirit pervades these pages. In contrast, the first few spreads that depict her impression of the city are static, restricted and less dense. They are instrumental in that the pictures depict precisely (and only) what is being said in the text. There are no additional details that the reader can look for in the pictures. There are binaries at work here — positive vs negative space, more straight lines compared to the free-flowing curves used for village life.



*Figure 8 Drawing from the City: apartment blocks in the city*

We barely see any people engaged in specific activities — we can see only the tops of their heads, never quite knowing what they are up to. They are peering through sterile apartment blocks, and out of car windows, all solitary. There is a sense of alienation, mystery and secrecy. We don't see them fully — we don't know who they are and what they are doing. The first few pages offer a



typical representation of pastoral (or rural) versus urban life (Eppley, 2018) — the nurturing, plural and dynamic rural, pit against the chaotic, monotonous and strange urban (Simmel, 1971).

Soon, this changes. When Ganesh Bhai, Teju's husband, asks her to sing along with him in public, he breaks traditional gender norms that he and Teju are expected to adhere to in their community — one could argue that his feminism aside, it is the urban that allows this; cities are traditionally thought of as being 'godless' and chaotic, prioritising the individual over the community, with the consequence that there is no more any place for the bonds, conventions, norms and beliefs that tie oneself to one's community. When Teju begins singing in public, the city changes; it becomes the medium that offers her the freedom to move, allows her aspirations to take flight.



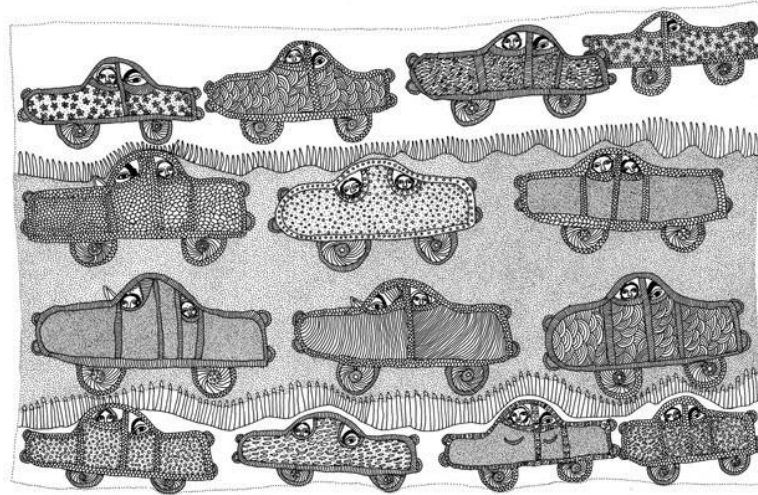
*Figure 9 Drawing from the City: Teju and Ganesh at the beach*

This changed relationship with the city is a turning point in the book, with the pictures once again coming alive. The first picture that shows this transformation, in a way mirroring Teju's own transformed relationship with the city, is of the couple singing together at a beach in Mumbai. This is the first time that we see full figures of the city people, knowing them and their own dynamics with each other and with the urban. They are no longer mysterious figures on the other side of the window — they are flesh-and-blood people who interact with space in ways similar to Teju herself. This is a particularly dynamic picture — people engaged in all kinds of activities, talking, walking, working — the men and women are dressed alike, and one cannot quite distinguish between genders as they make their way to or back from work, taking a stroll along the beach, staking claim

to spaces and making the city their own — a site of their transformation. In Teju's eyes, everyone has a claim to public space — slowly the city becomes a site of opportunity, perhaps even equal opportunity.

At this point in their lives, Ganesh Bhai makes the acquaintance of Haku Shah, the renowned Gandhian anthropologist, who spots another talent in him and commissions artwork. Not only does this bring in extra income for the family, it also brings Ganesh Bhai recognition and respect as an urban folk artist. Once again, he encourages Teju to pick up pen and paper. She takes to drawing far more naturally than her husband. Starting with illustrating episodes from traditional myths, folktales, and legends from their village, Teju moves on to drawing the world around herself — apartment blocks, people rushing past, moving cars, buses... nearly everything.

She begins to draw women on bikes, charting their own path, not decided by husband, child or family. She draws women in cars — “always two,” she says — with one of them looking out of the window, into the reader's eyes. These women are free, doing multiple things simultaneously — charting their own path, claiming their space in the city and in society, and also not missing the views and the experience the journey has to offer. No longer long-suffering women who have no rights or agency, whose lives are decided by everyone else except themselves, the women Teju draws no longer have to toil and struggle to claim their space in society and in the city. From illustrating her own background, her life in the village, and the lives of other men and women negotiating patriarchy, Teju reaches a point where she is envisioning a future for herself and other women, because of her changing relationship with the city — it becomes a space that allows resistance to patriarchy, allows movement and mobility, and even offers a promise of not just economic independence but also enjoyment through equal opportunity. Tejubehan is a flaneuse, and a unique one at that (Elkin, 2017) (D'Souza & McDonough, 2006) — as a ‘village woman’ from the Jogi community she carries the multidimensional burden of gender, geography, class, literacy and caste.

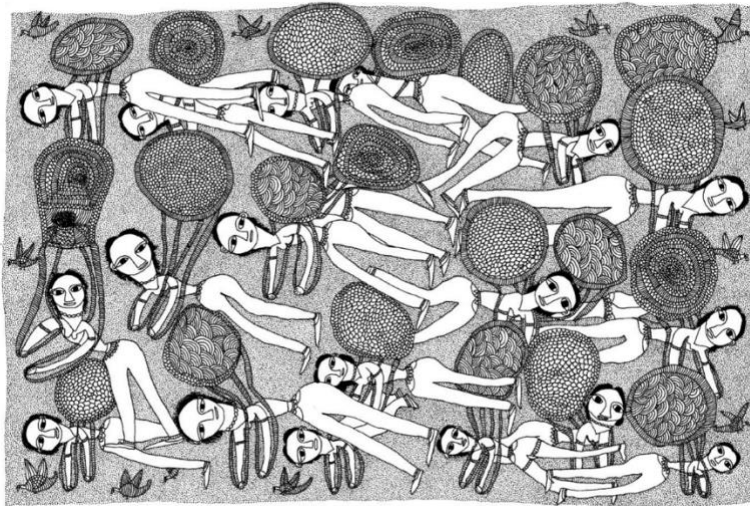


*Figure 10 Drawing from the City: there are always two women in the cars Teju draws*

## Woman of the City

In the pictures post Teju's transformed relationship with the city, the women are constantly moving — on bikes, in cars, descending from the sky in parachutes — marking their territory and charting their paths. Mobility is a strong determinant in how Teju sees the city and her (or other women's) relationship with urban space — migration to the city and mobility within the city are both important, since purely migrating to the city as a daughter or wife, an appendage to a man, does not guarantee the ability to resist and subvert patriarchal control of space and selfhood. Teju recognises that space plays a central role in social agenda, and spatial mobility is impacted by one's economic conditions and the cultural landscape (Silvey, 2006), both of which she depicts as less restrictive in the urban. She draws up a vision for women's liberation in a culture with oppressive gender norms and limiting societal expectations. Through her imaginative art, rooted in symbolism, Teju gives recognition, and possibly voice too, to scores of women like (and even unlike) herself, bearing the unequal brunt of patriarchy. Living in squalor at the edge of a city, with insufficient social capital, and taking care of the domestic sphere while the men go out and into the city for work, is not the vision she has for women. She depicts women moving out of oppression, while emphasising the *how* — through spatial (and as a consequence, social) freedom and mobility — women on foot, on bikes, in cars, and even aeroplanes — driving themselves and other women wherever they want to go, all while enjoying the journey!

Teju envisions a world where women are taking control of their lives and staking their claim to the world — and, crucially, all the while enjoying it. She envisions a world where being a woman means being free — freedom to move and freedom to even just be — in a way perhaps more than what others have envisioned, through specific, ‘limiting’ freedoms. Teju’s vision, on the other hand, is one that lets women just be. Her art and the straightforward cadence of the text, and the interdependence between them, not only generates a space for the reader, but there is also an intentionality of space (Meunier, 2013) that is conveyed.



*Figure 11 Drawing from the City: "Freedom to just be"*

# Infrastructure and Inequality in *Water*

Having looked at the transformative potential that the urban presents to women (and arguably other marginalised groups too), I now turn my attention to a defining feature of the urban — an abundance of different networks of infrastructure. In this chapter, I look at how infrastructure and resources serve and perpetuate social stratification in the urban, and also in its relationship with the rural. I will attempt to define the urban—rural dynamic through their relationship with, and access to, water as infrastructure. I will read infrastructure not as a good or service, but as a complex process — infrastructure as it is lived and experienced by communities. In doing so, I hope to uncover the different perspectives of communities towards infrastructure, and through it, understand urban culture, politics and ecologies.

Brian Larkin (2013) breaks down ‘infrastructure’ to define it as a network that is built to help the flow of services, goods, or ideas across space. It is a network of things that allows the movement of other things, and therefore foregrounds the relationship between these things. An infrastructure network decides and facilitates the movement of goods or services in a specific direction at a particular speed, to make them available to a specific set of consumers. Cities, and modern society, function because of the massive network of a whole universe of infrastructure that makes it possible, working in the background, almost becoming invisible in the sense that they contribute to the general everyday atmosphere of the cities without drawing attention to the workings of the network. Our senses respond to infrastructure — we see it, we hear it, we smell it, and we feel it — and it becomes a part of the everyday life and atmosphere of a city.

## Everyday Infrastructure

However, when infrastructure becomes commonplace and unobtrusive, we only register the end product that it makes available to us. We see water, not the vast network of bores, pipes, tanks and taps that bring us this water; we see light, not the coming together of powerplants, poles and wires that bring us the electricity. In this invisibility lie hidden the dreams, aspirations, and hierarchical structures of our society. Thus, we treat them as non-existent or unimportant in our study of infrastructure networks, thereby presenting a flat, unidimensional view of how these networks work, that is removed from reality. Infrastructure is closely tied with the workings of the

government, and the larger society — it embodies the relationships, hierarchies and power dynamics that exist in society. Infrastructure networks also reflect the desires and aspirations of a city and its people, and sometimes take on a whole new purpose and reason for existing, that is besides its technological function (Larkin, 2013). When we study infrastructure, then, we get a glimpse into its socio-cultural context, how it allows and facilitates certain experiences for a specific group of people, at the cost of denying those same rights and experiences to some others. Therefore, infrastructure operates not in a neutral space — it regulates behaviour, access, progress according to dominant power structures. As Collier (2011) notes, infrastructure is a combination of political decisions, administrative methods and lived experiences. It produces and organises space, bridges (or creates) distance, brings people and ideas into interaction — setting the ground for how social and economic systems operate (Graham & Marvin, 1996). Infrastructure networks hold the promise of freedom; but it is important to ask what kinds of freedom and for whom. The idea of freedom that infrastructure promises (and sometimes delivers) is not available to everyone, and is not equally and equitably distributed.

As Arjun Appadurai notes in his foreword of *Infrastructural Lives* (Graham & McFarlane, 2015), infrastructure can threaten everyday life as much as it can enable it. How one accesses infrastructure is determined by the power relations in a city, as with all other services. Infrastructure has always existed in cities, but it has been visible to some groups, and hidden from sight for other groups. Disadvantaged groups access infrastructure through constant struggle, conflict, and negotiation. I borrow the authors' (Graham & McFarlane, 2015) approach, and look at infrastructure not as a dimension of urban technology, but as a dimension of urban everyday life — infrastructure as a site for the production and practice of everyday life (Amin, 2006). As Appadurai notes, the everyday offers great potential for this exploration because of its dual nature — it enables the normalisation of oppressive relations but also simultaneously becomes the setting for subversion, resistance and negotiation of these dynamics (Appadurai, 2014; Arizpe & Styles, 2003). The production of the everyday through infrastructure is a fraught process, laden with power and exclusionary politics.

By focusing on one aspect of urban infrastructure, I will concentrate on how nature, as water, is commodified through capitalist social relations, and how its journey through urban and rural areas, and its accessibility to individuals or groups of urban society, are structured by the power relations

and political economies that make the city. Unequal social stratification in cities allows powerful groups to create ‘mini-cities’ of their own on the lines of caste, class, ethnicity, political affiliation, etc. Resources are then monopolised and access to infrastructure is politicised by social identity. In the process, marginalised groups and neighbourhoods are dispossessed of natural resources and infrastructure. Consequently, space is politicised — low density neighbourhoods with rich and powerful people have access to a greater share in the infrastructure pie, and marginalised neighbourhoods pay more than their fair share to access the same infrastructure, negotiating several obstacles, including government apathy, corruption, and violence.

When we look at infrastructure not as merely a good or service, but as a flow of relations, we see it in different light — as lived, power-laden, dynamic and enabling (or disabling) certain practices and ways of life. For example, while providing water for the swimming pools of the ultra-rich is seen as a sign of development, exploring where this water is being taken from, and whether there are communities that this water is being taken ‘away’ from, gives us a fair, albeit perhaps simplified, idea of how the same infrastructure is known and lived differently by different groups of people. For the people of the marginalised community that lives on the banks of the river whose water is being sent in pipes to upper class homes, but who seemingly have no right to access it, water, as infrastructure, is exclusionary and violent. As a process, infrastructure is produced and reproduced in vastly different ways by different groups of individuals within and between cities (and rural areas). By focusing on infrastructure through everyday life, we see how infrastructure doesn’t simply exist, but happens (Graham & McFarlane, 2015), as a set of social and material processes.

In order to see how infrastructure is used by the powerful to ‘other’ some sections of the population, and how this seeps into spatial relations, I will consider two picturebooks — *Water* (Vyam, 2017) and *I Will Save My Land* (Rinchin, 2017). These books deviate from earlier representations of the relationship between the urban and the rural in picturebooks. They do not present the urban and rural as entirely dichotomous sites, but instead focus on the precise dynamics that determine the nature of the relationship between the two sites. In doing so, they reveal the inequality between the urban and the rural, and how the former has a parasitic relationship with the latter.



## Inequality in Picturebooks

Often as the earliest glimpses of the outside world that babies and young children encounter, picturebooks do not shy away from talking about inequality. But traditional picturebooks have more often than not tended to portray inequality as somewhat inevitable (Dorling, 2018), as the natural order of things. Consequently, children are not encouraged to question inequality and oppression. As more and more children's books present inequality as just how things are supposed to be, children internalise the message that all will be well as long as this supposed order of things is not questioned, and that there is no need to question these unequal dynamics — that if they know 'their place in the world' and behave accordingly, all will be well. Of course, more recent picturebooks across the world have tried to remedy this by portraying reality more accurately, reflecting economic, racial, material and social inequality (Quast & Bazemore-Bertrand, 2019). One's understanding of space is connected with age because individual experiences and choices play a role in determining the way that space is experienced (Niskac, et al., 2010). When children find themselves in the books they read, it creates opportunities for parents and teachers to discuss different childhoods and diverse realities (Dedeoğlu, et al., 2011). *Water* and *I Will Save My Land* both not only portray inequality in a way that encourages children (and arguably adults too) to question the world around themselves but also sensitively present the processes that serve and perpetuate these inequalities.

### *Water*: Urban Logic in the Village

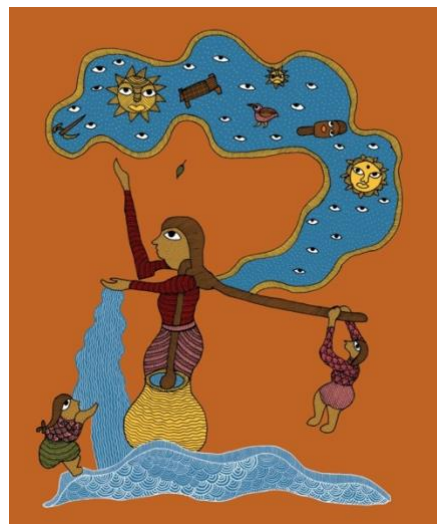
*Water* (Vyam, 2017) is an autobiographical account of Subhash Vyam, a traditional Gond artist, who moves from his village to the city in search of work and the promise that "everything was available there, and it was not difficult to earn money and live comfortably" (Vyam, 2017). He reflects on the relationship between the village and the city through the lens of water as infrastructure. He describes life in his village as harmonious with nature — they lived in the middle of forests and hills, worked hard, got fresh fruit, vegetables, fish and meat from the forest; they had lots of space though it was a hand-to-mouth existence.

However, water was not always easily available and was never enough. They depended on the rains, and a lake a few kilometres away, from where everyone got the water they needed to cook,



drink and bathe. They also bathed their animals, and washed their clothes and vessels at the lake, sharing it with all other creatures that depended on the lake for survival. This lake was fed by streams from a river that flowed in the hills, and with time people came up with simple ways of directing the water to their fields by creating small canals.

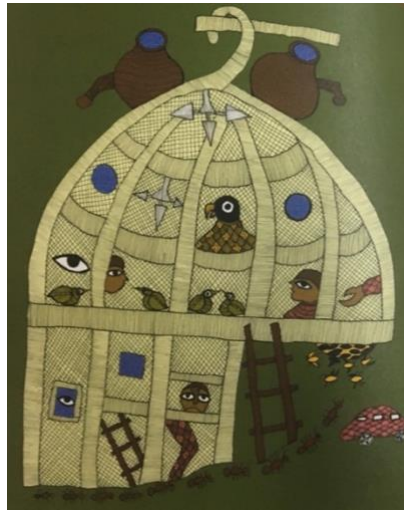
As the rains were seasonal, the lake would dry up in the summer, and life became difficult especially for the women and girls who would fetch water for everyone in the household. Vyam observes how even after a well is dug to collect and store water for the summer months, the burden of drawing and fetching water falls unfairly on the women. From canals and wells, the infrastructure in the village evolves. They get a hand pump connected to a deep tube well that is dug by the government. As the first manifestation of state sponsored ‘development’, everyone in the village comes to watch the pump being installed. The author-illustrator portrays this interaction between a traditional way of life and modern advancements through an interesting mix of traditional Gond motifs and his interpretation of modern infrastructure, to suggest that traditional rural culture and the sense of community is fast changing.



*Figure 12 Water: the first manifestation of development, a hand pump*

Life becomes much easier for the women and children — anybody can collect water now. Just as his village is seeing significant infrastructural changes, the author moves to the city. He lives in a small flat, symbolised by a bird cage in the traditional Gond style, where they have the

infrastructure for running water — pipes and two massive water tanks on the roof — but very infrequent running water.



*Figure 13 Water: life in the city*

He observes that unlike the village, where if there was a water shortage everyone suffered, here in the city there were neighbourhoods near his that had enough water for their lawns and swimming pools, but Vyam and his neighbours didn't have any. Vyam realises that although everyone relies on the same infrastructure network for water, whether one actually has access to it or not is determined by capital — social, cultural, political and economic. If there was enough water to fill swimming pools, why wasn't there enough for the basic needs of some sections of the city? Therefore, not only does infrastructure reveal inequality, it also becomes the means through which this inequality is experienced.

It is around this time that Vyam notices that a certain capitalistic urban logic (Lefebvre, 2003) creeps into the village. On his regular visits to see his family, he is happy to see incremental changes — a few roads and bridges have appeared, and plans are being made for a pipeline from the lake, and some houses have electricity. But, like in the city, it is the wealthier families that benefit from these developments in services and infrastructure. The disadvantaged are excluded from the comfort and freedom that these developments allow (Larkin, 2013).

The author makes a sudden trip back to his village some time later, following a worried message from his mother: she is not sure of the details, but the village headman, responsible for the smooth running of the village, has made an announcement about water, still a scarce resource for most people in the village. There are plans to build a huge dam across the river in the hills, which feeds the lake in their village. Will this make water more easily available to them? Or will it worsen the situation? The village headman explains that the dam will generate electricity *for the city*. The villagers wonder why the city (where “everything is available”) has to take away what is theirs — the dam will block the natural flow of the river and submerge their fields. In a classic example of how development policies are top-down, exclusionary and disconnected from the people they are supposed to help, the proposal to build the dam is never discussed with the villagers; they are simply informed. In some ways this increases the divide between the village and the city, but in others, it decreases this gap because of the direct (albeit deeply unjust and hierarchical) relationship that is now established between the city and the village.

## Covenant with Nature

Vyam suddenly remembers a tale his mother told his sisters and him many years ago when they grumbled about walking miles to get water. In this well-known Gond fable, seven sisters are sent by their parents to fetch water. After much walking and searching they see a lake. It is very deep, and they cannot reach the water. The lake, in typical mythical fashion, calls out to them, saying that she will come up only if they offer her the most valuable thing they possess. The youngest sister offers a beautiful, precious ring to the lake, and throws it into the water. The lake keeps its promise and rises up. The sisters are overjoyed and fill all their pots with water. But just as they are about to leave, the younger sister starts crying for her ring. Her sisters try to console her — they have got water, of greater need and value than her ring. And they remind her that the lake kept its word, and so must they. But she wants her ring back, now that they have got the water that they needed. Helpless, the eldest sister steps into the water to retrieve the ring. Unable to find it, she calls out to her sisters for help — one by one, they step into the lake, going deeper and deeper into the water, until it swallows them.

People’s response to their environment is influenced by their relationship with nature. Tribal societies have ecological rootedness, and are custodians of indigenous systems of knowledge

(Mathur, 2001). They have a relationship with nature that is neither of surrender nor of total kingship — an alternative way that is in keeping with the sensibility that nature and culture are not dichotomous or in polar opposition. With examples from diverse cultures, Mathur (2001) argues that nature is understood as an inviolable whole, deeply embedded in culture (Saraswati, 2001). She points to the concept of Prakriti (Sanskrit for nature) — it is founded on the synchrony of nature and culture, and not their dichotomy as in most Western philosophy. Indian indigenous tribes, like the Gonds, too have a value system that is full of ecological motifs and tropes, with the message that all living beings must live in symbiosis and co-operation. And that nature (and the covenants we make with it) is inviolable — we must not take more than we need, we must give enough time for nature to heal and replenish, and we must not break our promise of conservation and ecological integration.

Vyam echoes the Gond belief that in the mythical fable his mother narrated, the lake swallowed the seven sisters for not having kept their word — for making a pact with nature and, once they got from nature what they wanted, dishonouring the agreement. Communities that live close to nature establish a deep, respectful and intimate relationship with it and engage with it in a variety of ways (Mathur, 2001). Myths and folklore abound with examples of the tussle, and eventual reconciliation between nature and culture, and these are reflected in their everyday practices. The myth of the seven sisters too belongs to this tradition, coming from a people who have lived close to nature and share an intimate relationship based on respect and symbiosis. Vyam draws parallels between the seven sisters in this Gond myth, and their village — if the city was allowed to use the water from their river to produce electricity, they would be taking from nature more than what is sustainable. The city's relationship with the village and surrounding hinterland is parasitic — the city feeds on, and exploits, the resources that are available in the rural areas to a point where the survival of the village is threatened. The city has exploited and dishonoured the pact that the village has made with nature, and so the otherwise generous and nurturing nature punishes the village for taking more than what is due.

Because of the unequal relationship between the city and the village, the burden of paying for the exploitative and greedy resource extraction by the city falls on the village. And this unequal relationship is reproduced *in* the village and the city too, where those with economic, political, and social capital have easy access to more resources and infrastructure than they need, at the cost of

these resources being denied to those that feature lower in the social hierarchy, to the point that they cannot meet even their most basic necessities. Nikhil Anand (2011), working on the politics of water supply in Mumbai, analyses the role and stakes of different actors like the municipal corporation, engineers, politicians, slum dwellers, etc in supplying water to the dense city. Water supply to the slum is periodic and scarce; while the municipal corporation and engineers see it as a technical issue (improper pipe networks, insufficient pumping pressure, etc), for the slum dwellers it is a political issue. They engage powerful patrons who put pressure on elected officials to supply better infrastructure. So, the more powerful the middleman, the easier is your access to water supply. Slum dwellers are assured of some kind of water supply where there was none before, and the middlemen and elected representatives are assured of electoral support. Anand argues that there are two infrastructural networks that need to come together for the slum to be able to access water, a heavily commoditised resource (Appadurai, 2005): the water infrastructure (pipes, taps, engineers, bureaucracy), and the social network (slum dwellers, middlemen, elected officials).

There is an urban logic (Lefebvre, 2003) that creeps into Vyam's village — the little bit of development and infrastructural growth that his village sees, trickles down to the people, if at all, as a function of their economic and social capital. The wealthy houses have easier, more frequent and uninterrupted running water supply. While the entire network of tanks, pipes, taps and sewers is built so that it benefits the whole village equally, in reality it creates what Brian Larkin (2013) calls a "politics of as-if." Those at the top of the power structure draw up plans for new infrastructure *as if* they are for everyone, but which in reality prioritise and serve only some sections of the population and the spaces they inhabit. All policies and plans play out differently in different spaces, and have spatial consequences.

The ease and speed with which some spaces access infrastructure compared to others shows us that spaces are not neutral (Lefebvre, 2003); they are built by, and reflect, the promise that they hold for the people in control of those spaces as much as the people who use those spaces. They imbibe the exploitative, exclusionary and characteristics of our society, and allow certain kinds of behaviour and ways of governing and living. Graham and Marvin (1996) examine new systems of infrastructure to see how they reorganise urban space, and how water, energy, people, ideas, roads are bundled into a network of infrastructure that has come to define modern life, especially in

cities. In *Water*, the village respects nature and takes from it only what is needed, but the city takes more than its fair share, fuelled by greed and a lack of respect for nature. This is an interesting retelling of the traditional urban—rural dichotomy in most conventional picturebooks (Eppley, 2018); the urban is coded bad, but so is the village in some ways, infected by and mirroring the capitalist logic that is so characteristic of the urban (Lefebvre, 2003). The village is somewhat fetishised, as a place of virtue and innocence. In both the city and the village, it is the powerful who grab resources from the marginalised and break the pact they have made with nature. Infrastructure itself is not the problem, but how it is managed and distributed makes the issue complex. As in fables and myths, Vyam observes that the greedy and powerful have turned the city into a monster that is never satisfied, eating everything that is in its path. It is ever expanding, grabbing space and other natural resources that belong to others — Vyam worries that if the dam is built across the river that feeds their lake, it will flood the surrounding areas and swallow their village. The city is provoking nature, but it is the village that will pay for it. In some ways, it is the village that is caught in the tussle between nature and the city.

## Gond Motifs

The traditional Gond art that Vyam illustrates page after page with is replete with symbols and motifs revealing the deeply intimate relationship that the tribe has had with nature, accompanied by interesting depictions of modernity — the handpump, cars, flats — in the Gond style. In illustrating the hand pump as a woman whose braid forms the handle, the artist-author beautifully draws attention to the unfair burden on women and girls to walk miles searching for and fetching water. Even when the village builds a well, it is only the women who are fetching water. The lake is a place where the entire village comes together, as a space where everyday life is produced and practiced. As infrastructure, it is not fetishised like in the city — in the village, it is fully revealed, not hidden like in the city (Graham & McFarlane, 2015). It is also the setting for the respectful, harmonious co-existence of multiple life forms to play out — men and women, animals, birds, ducks, fish, all take responsibly from nature.

The Gond tree of life motif features prominently in the book. Vyam uses it not only to suggest the peaceful, rooted co-existence of all living things, but also to indicate that the village is highly stratified on the basis of social identity. The tree has strong roots that go deep into the soil, and

branches that reach far and wide. Vyam draws animals, birds, people and houses on different branches, indicating their place in the social hierarchy of the village. As the branches go higher, the houses get bigger, and we see more tools in the houses.

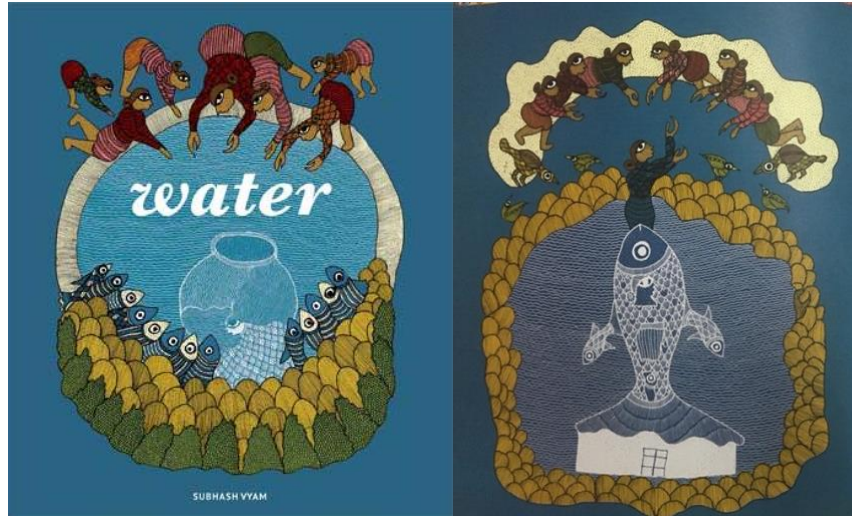


*Figure 14 Water: Gond 'tree of life' symbolising life in the village*

Changes in infrastructure and development in the village are hinted at subtly — canals being dug, water being drawn from the well, a lone car outside the biggest house, electricity, etc. Vyam also hints at who is reaping the benefits of these changes — those highest in the social hierarchy, powerful and wealthy. Vyam moves to the city in search of work, and ends up living in circumstances very different from his life in the village. He lives in a flat with two huge water tanks on the roof. This is portrayed by a large cage with unhappy faces living in it. There are two pots of water at the top of the cage, but the water does not seem to be reaching any of the households in the cage. They have the infrastructure for regular running water, but in reality, it does not reach the people who need it.

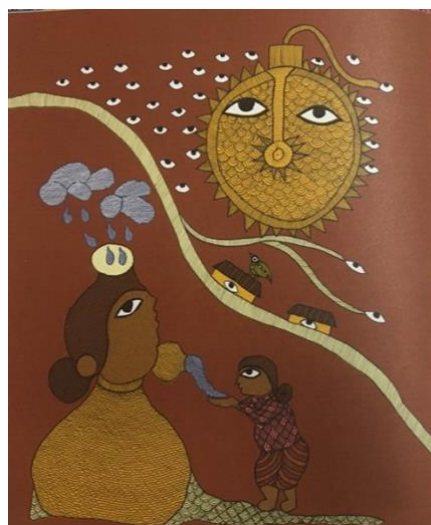
The ecosystem in the city is different — not many animals or birds co-existing with the people; instead we see cars in rows. Vyam documents the slow progress that he sees on his visits to the village — first the canals are dug, then there is a well, paved streets, a hand pump, electricity. The village slowly becomes a cluster of many worlds existing in the same time and space — interconnected through infrastructure networks, but whose benefits are not shared equally by all. In the Gond myth, Vyam draws a massive pot at the centre of the lake, to suggest that the lake (as

nature) supports and sustains life. One by one, as the sisters climb into the water in search of the youngest one's precious ring, the pot is replaced by a large fish which swallows all seven of them for having broken their promise. The myth is an allegory of the dangers of exploiting nature. We need nature, and its abundant resources, to survive, but it does not depend on us. It allows us to use its resources, but with some conditions. If we are greedy and exceed our limits, nature will unleash its fury.



*Figure 15 Water (cover): a pot symbolising nature sustaining life*

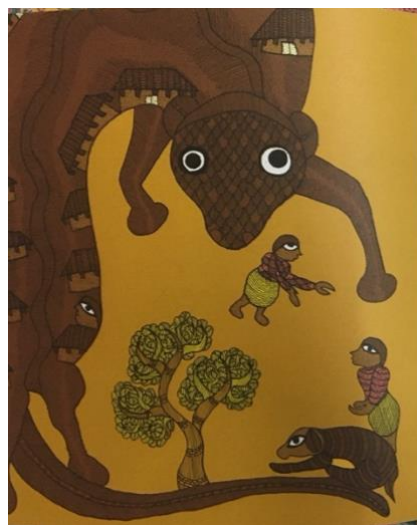
*Figure 16 Water: covenant with nature broken, the pot is replaced with a giant fish that swallows the sisters*



*Figure 17 Water: nature, as a ticking grenade*



Vyam draws several eyes to symbolise our growing demands on nature, represented as a ticking grenade, which will explode any moment. Speaking of the injustice in how the water infrastructure not only dispossesses the village in favour of the city but also makes the village pay for nature's fury, Vyam represents the city as a huge monster. As a space conceived (Lefebvre, 1974) by planners, policymakers and governments, the city has been turned into a monster by the rich and powerful. Vyam draws a giant, threatening monster with rows of houses and people in its belly, as it gets ready to swallow more, as a warning and urging people to keep our side of the covenant with nature.

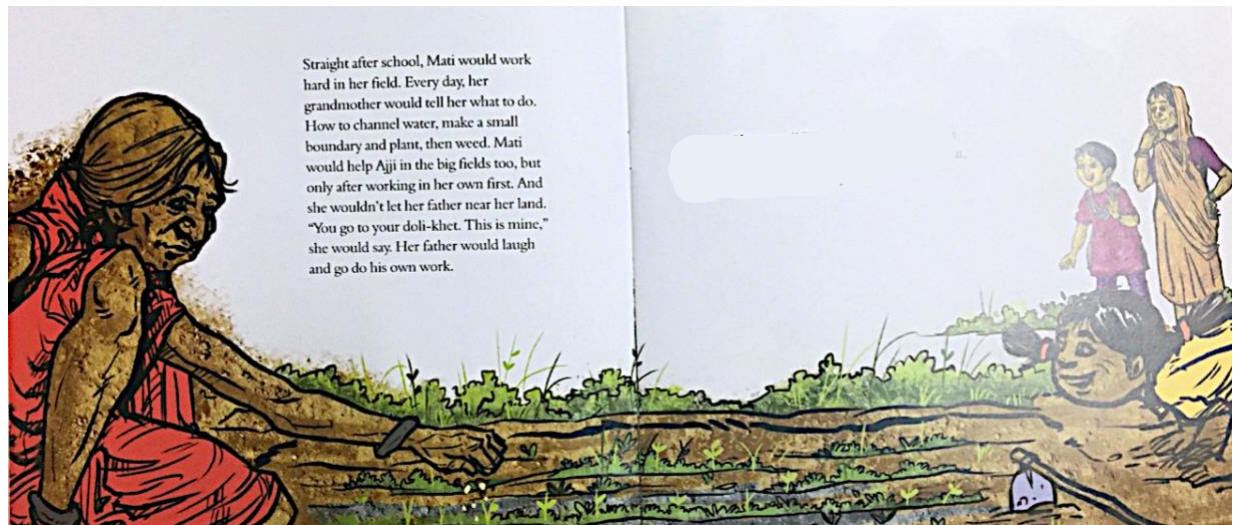


*Figure 18 Water: the city as a resource-guzzling monster*

## Monster Machines in *I Will Save My Land*

*I Will Save My Land* (Rinchin, 2017) is a sensitively told third person account of an issue that is ravaging tribal Chhattisgarh, inspired by the experiences of Rinchin, an activist who works with people's movements. In the book, little Mati lives in tribal Chhattisgarh, central India, with her father and feisty grandmother. As a woman, Ajji, her grandmother did not have a right over her parents' farmland when they died. And belonging to a 'lower' caste, she bore the double burden of gender and caste. She went to court against the 'upper' caste villagers who claimed the land belonged to the village, and that she ought to go back to her husband's house to look after his land. Ajji did not back down, and finally won her land back. Eager to have her own piece of land, like her feisty Ajji, Mati pesters her father and grandmother till her grandmother relents. She buys her

a shovel and marks out a small square on which Mati can grow everything that grew in the big fields — rice, tomato, potato, peanuts... Everyday her grandmother teaches her to care for her farm, her land — how to channel water, how to plant, and then weed.



*Figure 19 I Will Save My Land: Aji teaching Mati to care for her field*

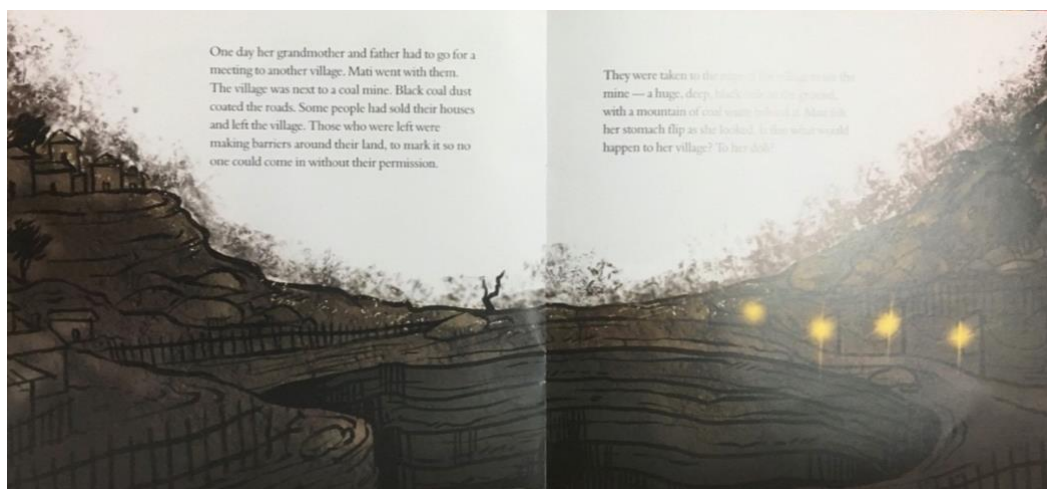
A grassroots feminist, Aji always goes to the village meetings, sometimes taking Mati along. On one such occasion they find out that a company wants the villagers to give up their land for a coal mine. They are promised lots of money, with which they could buy a vehicle, build a new house (but on what land?), or send their children to expensive schools far away. Some of the big farmers with other sources of income and other assets agree to sell their land, but not the small farmers. How would they live without land? Farming was what gave them their specific culture and rootedness. If the coal mine came, not only would they lose their (perhaps only) asset, they would also lose their livelihoods — as small farmers, their entire existence revolved around farming. It would be impossible to fix a monetary value for what they would have to give up.

In ascribing a one-time exchange value (Nicholas, 2011) (Marx, 2009) to the villagers' land, the capitalist economy dispossesses them not only of their source of steady income, but also of their sense of identity, belonging and rootedness, all for 'development'. This inherent feature of capitalism, where growth is powered by the accumulation of resources in the hands of a few, at the cost of resources and rights being denied to others, was termed 'accumulation by dispossession' by David Harvey (2003). This, in turn, has spatial consequences.



*Figure 20 I Will Save My Land: Mati and Ajji at village meetings*

Like her Ajji, Mati too is worried about her land. She accompanies her father and grandmother to a meeting at a nearby village that sold its land to the coal company. They are greeted by black coal dust on every road. Unable to live there, some villagers have left the village, while the others live in constant fear of the situation worsening; of the company coming back to occupy more land.



*Figure 21 I Will Save My Land: coal mine in the neighbouring village*

The coal mine is at the edge of the village — a deep, massive, black hole in the ground, with coal waste lying behind it in mountains, infiltrating the air they breathe, almost choking them. Mati feels sick — would her small piece of land end up looking like this too?

She plays with the children of this village, and falls asleep while the elders are still preoccupied with the meeting even after dark. She opens her eyes and is surprised to see one half of them lighting lamps and getting ready to go somewhere. Her new friends tell her the elders take turns to do *perhredari* (keeping watch) — guarding the village so that the bulldozers, as “monster machines”, don’t eat up more land to get to the coal. The people from the coal company come in the dead of night to dig up land with their monster machines, dispossessing the villagers of their land, which has guided and added meaning to their lives for generation.



*Figure 22 I Will Save My Land: Mati's new friends describing the monster machines*

Coming back to their village, Mati feels personally threatened by the possibility of losing her little piece of land to monster machines and a monster-corporation. Unbeknownst to her father and her grandmother, she takes her shovel and a torch, and sets out in the dark. Her father and her Ajji look everywhere in and around their house, in vain. Her grandmother finally spots her sleeping in their field, clutching her shovel. Asked what she is doing there, Mati says, “I am saving my land.”





*Figure 23 I Will Save My Land: Mati sleeping next to her small field, guarding it*

This picturebook sensitively portrays an issue that is threatening tribal lands in all parts of India, and arguably, the rest of the world too. Planners and administrators, especially, have a narrow, western, capitalistic idea of development, without paying heed to what this development costs us. Indigenous tribal communities are resisting the idea that the rural is a place that exists and is important only in order to provide the urban with cheap resources — natural and human. Migrants from villages are routinely expected to contribute to the development of a city that denies them basic rights, functioning merely as cheap labour.

Like the uncertain future that Tejubehan's family (in *Drawing from the City*) faces in the city, both these books give importance to Lefebvre's idea of 'right to the city' (Lefebvre, 1968). The migrant and/or rural population is expected to service the city, while being denied a just and equal share in the co-creation of the city, with the possibility of enjoying the fruits of their labour.

Like *Water, I Will Save My Land* too offers an interesting and necessary perspective on the traditional urban—rural dichotomy. It shows how infrastructure is built by the goods, services and resources (human and natural) that are provided by the rural, but the benefits of this infrastructure accrue to an entirely different set of people. In the capitalist economy, one geographical space is prioritised over another, reflecting the unequal relationships that exist within and between these spaces. The issue is one of unequal development, where wealth decides who gets what resources,

and with what degree of affordability and accessibility, even within the same city or village. *I Will Save My Land* is a book about politics; Ajji is a grass roots feminist, active in the social and political life of her village, fighting caste, gender and spatial oppression. Both *Water* and *I Will Save My Land* offer an alternative to the conventional idea of development; they complement, and sometimes subvert, western academic perspectives, shining a light on the culturally specific aspirations and ways of living of the global south. In *Ordinary Cities*, Jennifer Robinson (2006) makes a case for viewing all cities as ‘ordinary’, rejecting a hierarchical understanding and labelling of cities as western, developed, third-world, developing, etc. By understanding each city as ordinary, unique in itself, we see it as a dynamic and diverse arena of social and economic life.

As unusual topics for discussion in children’s picturebooks, a key feature of both these books is that they focus attention on the underrepresented lives of children, and marginalised sections of society. They portray violence — against nature, against a community, against a space. This is because of an urban bias (Lipton, 1976) in the capitalist economy and policymaking. Economic (and by extension spatial, social) development is not fair or equitable because certain groups, by their central location (where cities are centres of accumulation of resources) and power in urban areas, are able to pressure governments to protect their interests. In *Water*, the urban bias can be seen each time the author goes back to his village — there is development, but it favours the homes of the rich and powerful, people who possibly know the right people and have urban clout. As the author notes, in cities too, when there is a shortage of resources, not everyone experiences the shortage — those with economic and social capital are spared, and those without are forced to bear an unfair share of the burden. Corporations grab land and other resources from marginalised villagers on the pretext of development, but as Rinchin and Vyam both illustrate, this development is not for them, it is for a more privileged space — the city. An economic and political issue is presented by both books as a spatial issue, without reducing it to the rural-urban dichotomy. The problem, of course, is not infrastructure or development, but the inequity and inequality in how they are made available to different social groups.

## Conclusion

Cities are large, dense settlements of socially heterogeneous groups, formed when resources — economic, human, political, social, or cultural — start getting concentrated in a particular space (Wirth, 1938). While cities have always existed, the period since the industrial revolution saw a rapid increase in the number of cities, and radical changes in the nature of these cities. Cities impact social lives not just because people live and work in them, but also because they are the concentration and controlling centre for resources. They arise from, and are sustained by, a need to centralise the goods and services produced by rural activity. Consequently, they begin to dominate their hinterlands because they create and allow a certain division of labour and specific behavioural patterns. To really understand this urbanism, sociologists have studied the city as more than just a geographic space that acts as the setting against which our lives play out. Instead they view it as a dynamic actor that impacts social life, allowing and encouraging certain behaviours from certain groups of people, while simultaneously making these same experiences unavailable to some others. Cities break down and disregard older systems of stratification and hierarchy to create a new mode of stratification that is purely based on one individual's utility to another. Perhaps for this reason, cities are credited with encouraging newer and progressive ways of thinking.

Literature from across the world has been preoccupied with urban space and its role in society. Every story not only spans, but also organises many spaces (de Certeau, 2011). And so, imbuing spaces with meaning, stories transform them into places. Thus, the diverse politics, prejudices, dreams and dynamics of different groups of people are mirrored in the spaces that they occupy, and the places that they make, evident in the literature they produce. Books act as an archive of the many features of a social space that give it particular characteristics, and represent the layers of meaning that these spaces are imbued with. Equally important is the visual medium in conveying to us these dynamics that permeate the spaces we occupy. Picturebooks, deemed largely unimportant till recently because of their traditionally intended readers (children), play a very important role in introducing to children the world that they inhabit. Text and illustrations come together and interact, to make and convey meaning. Picturebook ecology and the dynamics between text and pictures work in various ways to illustrate how the social world functions.

Books like *Water, I Will Save My Land*, and *Drawing from the City* mirror the larger economic, political and sociocultural changes that Indian society has seen in the recent past. *Drawing from the City* (Jogi, 2012) tells the story of a young girl's journey to, and within, a city, negotiating it as a child from a village, growing up into a teenager in the city and finally as a young, married working woman. Tejubehan is born into endemic poverty in an orthodox, disenfranchised patriarchal community of wandering musicians. Patriarchy monitors women's social life through restrictions on their mobility. Social control of gender is achieved through spatial control (Massey, 1994). All this changes when she moves to the city and gets married to a kind, progressive man from the same community, who encourages her to sing, and draw, helping her become the artist that she is.

In *Drawing from the City* Tejubehan draws the story of her journey, gently challenging gender and societal norms in and through the urban. Living in the peripheries of Ahmedabad and later, Mumbai, Teju's urban experience is characterised by mobility and movement: everything is on the move — trains, buses, aeroplanes, even people are always rushing past. Cities break down traditional forms of orthodoxy and social hierarchy, allowing women like Teju to explore and voice their dreams and aspirations, and finding their sense of self. A space that is alien and isolating at first, the city becomes freeing and transformative for Teju. *Drawing from the City* is a unique and powerful representation of the gendered nature of the urban experience, and raises questions of the 'right to the city' (Lefebvre, 1974) on such an understanding.

To have a well-rounded understanding of urbanism and the urban, we must consider the urban in its relationship with the rural. Traditionally, literature has portrayed the urban and the rural as entirely dichotomous — the rural as a place of harmony, community and nurturing, and the urban as chaotic, individualistic and sterile (Eppley, 2018). This is true of conventional picturebooks too. Certain postmodern picturebooks (May, 1997), though, present a more nuanced take on the fraught relationship between the two geographical spaces, where neither is completely good or bad. In *I Will Save My Land* we can see how the city is shown to have a parasitic relationship with the hinterland — as if the rural exists only to service the urban, at great cost to itself. Critical in this transaction is infrastructure — understood not merely as a network that allows the flow of goods, services and ideas, but as a complex process, lived and experienced by communities (Larkin, 2013).



In *Water* (Vyam, 2017), we see how infrastructure transforms a village — while the pipes and hand pumps make the lives of Vyam and other members of the Gond tribe easier, they, as infrastructure, also bring with themselves problems that Vyam notices in the city. Previously the village had a harmonious (albeit hand-to-mouth) existence with nature, and their trials and successes were shared equally by all the members of their community. Once piped water infrastructure is made available to the village, Vyam notes that the social hierarchy and inequality that he saw in the city, began to affect his village too. The infrastructure is not shared equally by everyone. When there is a scarcity of resources, it is the poor and marginalised people in the community who suffer, while those with social and economic capital continue enjoying the resources that should have been shared equally. The urban logic of the city creeps into the village like a monster. The situation is worsened when plans to build a dam over the river near the village start taking shape. Not only is the dam not going to be of use to the village (as it is meant to generate electricity for the city), it threatens the very existence of the village, with a danger of flooding. Vyam uses traditional wisdom, in the form of a Gond myth, to warn us of the consequences of breaking our promise to nature. Nature is kind and nurturing, only as long as we respect it and do not take more than what is our share of resources. While infrastructure itself might not create inequality, it certainly allows and encourages, through policy and execution, those behaviours that widen the gap between the privileged elite and the marginalised (Graham & McFarlane, 2015). Thus, the urban has transformative potential, but it also lets certain inequalities play out through, ironically, the very goods and services that are supposed to deliver modernity and an improved quality of life to its users.

Through unconventional picturebooks that are rooted in Indian society and culture, I have explored the different ways that the urban is understood, negotiated and experienced in contemporary India. These books reflect, and even contribute to, social dynamics and change playing out in social space, offering us insights into what Indian urbanism is. I follow Jennifer Robinson's approach, viewing Indian cities as ordinary cities (Robinson, 2006) — not viewing them as non-western, non-developed cities. Hopefully, by using unconventional source material like picturebooks that have a strong Indian ethos, I have made a case for studying Indian cities in a way that acknowledges their cultural and social uniqueness, and does not view them as mere shadows or replicas of western cities.



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